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Lilith

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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth." (Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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—Nessa Rapoport

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Lilith

Editor in Chief
Susan Weidman Schneider *susanws@lilith.org*
Managing Editor
Naomi Danis *naomi@lilith.org*
Senior Editor
Susan Schnur *susanschnur@lilith.org*
Fiction Editor
Yona Zeldis McDonough
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Book Reviews
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Lindsay Barnett *lindsay@lilith.org*
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Lilith
250 West 57th Street, #2432
New York, NY 10107
p: 212-757-0818
info@Lilith.org www.Lilith.org

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ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE HOLLANDER

Five things we know about women's free labor.

It's an old story, of course. The ongoing narrative about the work of caregiving. It's largely unremunerated. And unrecognized. And almost always done by women.

Just look at your Facebook feed. Check out the volume of posts by women matter-of-factly reporting on the care they are giving, seeking, managing or worrying about for people they love. Mother of a challenged newborn. Wife whose husband is hospitalized is managing his medical options plus the kids' emotional turmoil. Daughter of an octogenarian wants recommendations about nursing homes. Mother of two boys seriously injured reports on an insurance crisis. Twentysomething best friend is looking after her peer in rehab after knee surgery. Neighbor seeking anonymous contributions to help a family whose breadwinner died suddenly.

I know that none of this is unfamiliar to you, Dear Reader. I did say it's an old story.

And (not to see the world according to a gender binary), I'm betting that Facebook posts by men you know are mostly about their world-moving opinions on global issues.

Here are a few things we know (and need to remember) about women's free labor in weaving this web of care. Be a little surprised that I'm not railing against a system for exploiting women.

1. Women expect to be called on, and to be on call.
All of this is our village. Being able to take some time off from paid work to do our unpaid "species work"—as Rabbi Susan Schnur once named it—is one of the blessings provided to some fortunate employees by the U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act. (The act would have won approval from the late, great Bella Abzug, who once suggested we all go out into the world and affix stickers to such things as ads featuring women in leadership, gender-equal rosters, nonsexist packaging and equitable laws: "This Change Brought to You by Feminism.")

But whether the workplace reacts well or not, truth is our communities (largely of women) are accustomed to snapping into place: meals for the kids at home, an offer of a ride to the hospital, the willingness to walk someone's dog, feed the fish, water wilting plants (watering plants being a proxy for all the maintenance items of daily life).

2. Big-tent feminism lets us recognize women for our unremunerated work in fixing the world.
Almost every woman expects to participate in the paid labor economy during her adult life. Except for when she's taking care of others.

I'm not talking here about the routine matters of running a household with young children, or preparing lunch for your officemates, or organizing a meeting for your professional organization or for the local save-the-park group. I'm talking about the draining, scary work of caregiving and organizing that falls to women who have to spring into action when someone they love (or even just someone they know) is in need of succor. No apologies for answering these needs empathically.

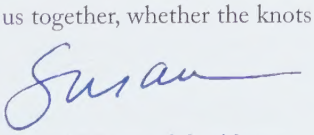
But we do need to hallow the work that we do, honoring it just as we now want to honor the humble objects handed down from previous generations (see "Material Culture" in this issue), because caregiving is the connective tissue of community.

3. Women appear to be elastic. We seem to be able to stretch our days (and even our nights) to accommodate the needs of other people.
Those Facebook posts and my own intimate brushes with caregiving have me thinking about the sheer number of hours women log in. Every item on your to-do list spawns its own subset of time-sinking but necessary items.

Which brings me to: Rabbi Sue Fendrick, who expressed her appreciation to friends for help she'd needed and received. Then she asked her Facebook buddies to tell her when *they* need help, "especially single mothers." Her words stuck; they reminded me of how infrequently we're explicit about the help we ourselves could use.

4. We don't ask often enough for what we need.
There's a lot in the air about collaboration in business, and in this issue of Lilith in a piece on the differences in leadership styles among generations of Jewish feminists. But we've not heard enough about *asking* for collaborators in other contexts, or asking for what we need, so that our shoulders don't have to bend as we bear the weight of it all ourselves. Perhaps social media make it easier. Our asking can be depersonalized when we're just putting the request out there and not making ourselves directly vulnerable with any individual. When you're confident your request will be heard, it can be as simple as asking for a ride to a doctor's appointment. The Yiddish maxim quoted by my late Babba sounds in my ears. "*Az m'klopt, amfertmen.*" Knock and they will answer.

5. There is no dishonor in not getting paid for caregiving. Yet we have no honorable mechanism for rewarding it.
There may be sacrificial economic and personal costs when an individual has to care for another. But in addition to acknowledging this while we do our deep breathing, let's validate this caregiving as the important contributor that it is—not only to the welfare of the individuals being looked after, and to that person's micro-system, but also to the health of the village as a whole. Caregiving reinforces the security of the web that holds us together, whether the knots are of kinship or friendship.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

SPERM BANK

Here's a Sperm Donor "Sibling Registry"

The availability of sperm from anonymous donors, typically purchased from sperm banks, has been a boon to single women, lesbian partners and heterosexual couples wrestling with fertility challenges. One risk, though, is that certain genetic characteristics or mutations may be spread more widely in a population when one man can father dozens or even hundreds of children if he has sold his sperm frequently. Another risk is that with anonymity promised to both donor and purchaser, the children born of this conception have no way to trace where half their DNA comes from. The Donor Sibling Registry wants to end this anonymity.

Wendy Kramer and her son **Ryan** founded the DSR in 2000 to assist people who were conceived as a result of sperm, egg or embryo donation to make mutually desired contact with others who share their genetic ties. Initially, they wanted to find Ryan's siblings and the man Ryan calls his father. Nearly 3000 matches were made before Ryan, 16 at the time, was connected with one of his siblings, a sister.

A new book, *Finding Our Families: The first-of-its-kind for donor-conceived people and their families* by Wendy Kramer and **Naomi Cahn**, J.D., advocates opening up the records for all. In a recent review, **Mirah Riben** pointed out that "infertility practitioners followed the model of adoption in which those becoming parents used to be told they never had to tell their children they were adopted." In this book, Riben says:

"Kramer and Cahn share the belief that donor-conceived children's desire to know their genetic family 'must' be honored...." and "'that knowing about your origins is not only an innate desire but a right.' Their radical position is not shared by all who have benefited from anonymous reproduction or hope to. Many are concerned that outlawing anonymous genetic contributions will reduce the number of donors as they believe happened in the UK. DSR however has gathered data that proves no such decline."

From **Mirah Riben**, "Finding Family Truths and Roots," Huffington Post, March 13, 2015

Wendy Kramer and her son, Ryan.

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK

NEW RITUALS

Teen Gender Transition at a Jewish Day School

Thirteen-year-old **Tom Sosnik**, wearing a tallit and holding a kiddush cup, marked a transition into manhood with a special ceremony at his Jewish day school. He wasn't celebrating receiving a first prayer book or a first Bible, or graduating from one grade to another. He wasn't really observing his bar mitzvah, either. In what was a decidedly nontraditional event, the short-haired teenager was publicly marking his gender transition from girl to boy.

Sosnik's Jewish ritualized coming out as transgender in front of classmates, teachers and family at the Tehiyah Day School in El Cerrito, California, is believed to be the first time that a Jewish day school has sanctioned and performed such a ceremony.

"We've noticed more gender-expansive students in our school, and in Jewish and independent schools in general," said Tehiyah interim head of school **Elise Prowse**.

Rabbi Tsipi Gabai, the school's rabbi and director of Jewish studies, took into consideration the high rate of suicide and suicide attempts among transgender individuals (one study put it as high as 41 percent) when deciding to work with Sosnik and his parents on crafting the content of the ceremony. "I take what is said in the Talmud, that when one saves a single soul it is as if one saves the whole world, very seriously," the rabbi said.

When asked whether she had any concerns about her child transitioning at such a young age, Tom's mother, Esti Sosnik, said she had no doubt about Tom's gender identity. "I have no worry about his making this decision at 13. I am so happy for him to live the right gender for him."

While acknowledging the societal risk Tehiyah's leadership took in performing Sosnik's transition ceremony, **Marc Kramer**, executive director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network commended the school for being "a safe, warm, accepting place that accepts children for who they are."

From **Renee Ghert-Zand** in *timesofisrael.com*, March 26, 2015.

TEACHERS ARE WORKING PARENTS TOO

When we suggest changes to the day school system that would help middle-class families—a longer school day, events on Sundays, fewer cancellations—we need to consider who the adults are who will be arriving at school at 7 am, staying until 6 pm, directing siddur plays on Sundays, giving parent-teacher conferences on weekday evenings.

Day school teachers work longer hours for far less pay than our colleagues in public schools. Your children's teachers work tirelessly to instill Jewish values in your children, but they don't earn enough money to send their own children to the schools where they work. (It's true. How much is a year of full-cost tuition at your kid's school? Depending where in the country you live, your kid's teacher might not earn much more than that number.)

From **Amy Newman**, *forward.com*, March 27, 2015

Seventy-seven years after being turned away by university officials, 102-year-old pediatrician Ingeborg Syllm-Rapoport received her Ph.D. on June 9th. As a doctoral student in Nazi Germany, Rapoport finished her dissertation on diphtheria at just 25. Her professor praised her work, but she was barred from taking her oral examination for racial reasons: her mother was Jewish. In May of this year, the University of Hamburg tried to right its wrong by allowing Rapoport to defend her dissertation. After months of studying practically a century's worth of research on diptheria, she passed. "I know a lot more about diphtheria now than I did then," says Rapoport, according to the Wall Street Journal.

SHAMING

Teen Girls Challenge Sexist School Dress Codes

The #Iammorethanadistraction campaign, started by girls at South Orange Middle School in New Jersey who were fed up with the school administration's shaming emails and loudspeaker announcements about dress code enforcement, gives a catchy slogan to female students everywhere who are tired of being considered "distractions to the learning environment."

In Toronto, high school students recently protested slut-shaming dress codes by participating in a #croptopday, which took off on social media. "Having my stomach/thighs/shoulders show does not compromise my intelligence or actions," reads the caption of one student's photo.

The play "SLUT," developed by the 8-18 year-old members of The Arts Effect All-Girl Theater Company in New York City, began its national tour in April. It's another call to action, challenging sexual shaming and sexual assault.

But for Jewish girls and young women attending Jewish day schools—and especially those attending Orthodox schools—dress codes are often more stringent and can feel even more degrading than for their secular counterparts. In "Voyeurism and the Yeshiva Girl," on the Lilith Blog, **Elana Sztokman** critiques the policing of girls and the sexist enforcement of dress codes in Orthodox schools: "All girls at Orthodox schools whose knees, chests and elbows are glared at by staff to determine whether their clothes are too 'immodest' are victims of unwanted gaze and voyeurism."

PHOTO: NIV MIYASATO

The "Young Feminists League" of South Orange Middle School, who started the #Iammorethanadistraction campaign.

MODESTY POLICING

"A group of women in Beit Shemesh filed a petition Tuesday asking a Jerusalem administrative court to order their ultra-Orthodox mayor and the city to take down 'modesty signs' instructing women pedestrians how to dress. The same group of women scored a key victory in a district court in January when the Beit Shemesh municipality was compelled to financially compensate the women for the threats and violence they had suffered from modesty-policing Haredi elements."

TO WOMEN & GIRLS WHO PASS THROUGH OUR NEIGHBORHOOD
WE BEG YOU WITH ALL OUR HEARTS
PLEASE DO NOT PASS THROUGH OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN IMMODEST CLOTHES
MODEST CLOTHES INCLUDE: CLOSED BLOUSE, WITH LONG SLEEVES, LONG SKIRT - NO TROUSERS. NO TIGHT-FITTING CLOTHES
PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB THE SANCTITY OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, AND OUR WAY OF LIFE AS JEWS COMMITTED TO G-D AND HIS TORAH.
NEIGHBORHOOD RABBIS
TORAH & WELFARE INSTITUTIONS
LOCAL RESIDENT COUNCILS
אל העוברת בשכונותינו!
מבקשים אנו ממך בכל לשון של בקשה
אנא אל תעברי בשכונתינו בלבוש לא צנוע
לבוש צנוע כולל: חולצה סגורה, עם שרוול ארוך. חצאית ארוכה - לא מכנסיים. ולא בלבוש צר
אנא אל תפריעי לקדושת שכונתינו ולאורח חיינו כיהודים נאמנים לתורתנו!
רבני השכונות
מוסדות התורה והחסד
ועד השכונה

From **Allison Kaplan Sommer**, "Women petition court to order ultra-Orthodox Israeli mayor to remove illegal 'modesty signs'," *Haaretz.com*, May 28, 2015.

SARAH SELTZER ON SPINSTERS

Recently, I joined a Facebook group of women discussing writing residencies and became fascinated by the voraciousness with which many of the members were clamoring for a week or two without their families and friends. For many contemporary women, the fantasy of solitude...still manifests as a longing for a physical separation, a room of their own. It's not because all husbands and children are tyrants (though some may be), but because saying no is easier when some outside force does it for you. This contemporary feminist quandary has manifested frequently in literary culture this year, whether it's in memoirs and novels about women leaving society behind entirely or even the heated debate about "sponsored writers," which asks whether it's fair to use a patriarchal means (a husband with a large income) to achieve the feminist goal of time and space to create.

And yet whenever I think along these lines and decide to go rent a room in a monastery, I am reminded of Toni Morrison, who often notes that motherhood, that supposed creativity-killer, actually transformed her into a writer. "My sons needed me to be real, to know what I was doing, you know?" she has said. "I didn't write anything before I had them. They gave me that." The truth is, the major dilemma that underscores the dichotomies of marriage vs. single life, kids vs. childlessness, is a much larger question: how do you build a complete self in a world that wants to see you as merged with or subsumed by other people?

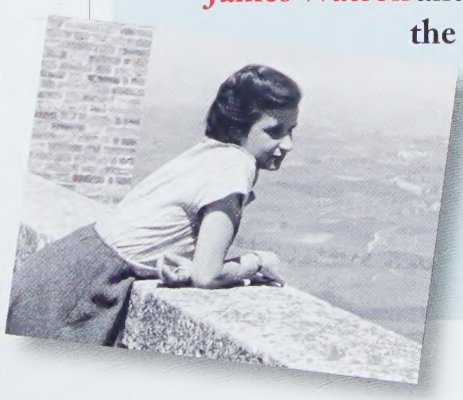
From **Sarah M. Seltzer**, "Why We Should All Be Spinsters: Writers Take on a New Feminine Mystique," *flavorwire.com*, April 14, 2015.

Coming Soon! 3 Bios on Stage and Screen

Hilary Swank as Holocaust historian (and Lilith author) **Deborah Lipstadt** in the screen adaptation of Lipstadt's book *History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier*! The story of her successful legal battle with a revisionist British historian who accused Lipstadt of libel will be scripted by **David Hare**.

Natalie Portman will play Supreme Court Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** in "On The Basis of Sex," a film chronicling Ginsburg's fight for equal rights for women under the law. Now both an adored Jewish feminist and pop-culture icon known as "RBG," in 1971 Ginsburg authored the brief that convinced the Supreme Court to hold unanimously that the Constitution's promise of equal protection of the laws applies to women.

Nicole Kidman will play **Rosalind Franklin** in London's West End this fall in the U.K. premiere of "Photograph 51," the prize-winning play by **Anna Ziegler** about the often-overlooked Jewish female scientist. Franklin was a key investigator, along with **James Watson** and **Frances Crick**, in the discoveries of DNA's double-helix structure. They won the Nobel Prize for the discovery. She died of ovarian cancer before her work was ever fully acknowledged.



HILLARY SWANK PHOTO: MANFRED WERNER. DEBORAH LIPSTADT PHOTO: IMAGE COURTESY OF THE UW-STROUM CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES. NATALIE PORTMAN PHOTO: THORE SIEBRANDS. RUTH BADER GINSBURG PHOTO: COLLECTION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES, PHOTOGRAPHER: STEVE PETTEWAY. NICOLE KIDMAN PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/BURNINGKARMA. ROSALIND FRANKLIN PHOTO: VITTORIO LUZZATI.

BAD RABBIS

Looking Can Be Abuse

Writing about **Barry Freundel**'s actions, victimizing his female congregants and others by secretly videotaping them naked in the mikveh, I argued that there is such a thing as sexual abuse that does not involve physical contact, and we should not dismiss the impact of this kind of abuse on its victims just because there was no direct physical contact. In blog posts in May, I wrote that the recovery from this so-called non-violent abuse can be just as emotionally challenging as violent sexual abuse because of the way it plays with the victim's mind.

The sense of constantly being watched, even in one's private moments, that there are eyes on your skin and on your form when you have not invited those eyes in, can be mentally, emotionally and spiritually debilitating. You play it over in your mind in unsuspecting moments, wondering why you feel so strange and uncomfortable, wondering why the whole world feels unsafe for you. I compared it to the experience that teenage girls have when they privately "sext" with their boyfriends and then their boyfriends share the photos with the world; research shows that girls have a very difficult time recovering from this, and can find themselves dealing with depression, drug abuse, eating disorders and suicide.

Then I made the controversial argument that all girls at Orthodox schools where their knees, chests and elbows are discussed ad nauseam, and where their bodies are glared at by staff to determine whether their clothes are too "immodest" or sexually revealing, are also victims of unwanted gaze and voyeurism.

The responses to this post have been for the most part validating. But as we know, the blogosphere can be brutal, and Orthodox men who feel threatened by women's words can be particularly obnoxious. One man wrote, on another thread, "The idea of modesty is exactly the opposite—to take attention away from others' bodies to their personalities and expressions of their souls." This is the Orthodox party-line: that excessive emphasis on female body-cover actually "protects" women, even if that "protection" entails a rabbi standing at the door as girls walk into school and commenting on their knees and chests. A woman replied online with the cogent point that, "As a woman, constant harping on how you have to cover your elbows to protect the men is not much better than constant harping on how you have to show off for them."

But another man wrote to me privately: "Voyeurism is usually considered observing others while in a state of undress and engaging in private behavior in what they consider a private place. What you describe, while deeply inappropriate in its own right, is not voyeurism—just as voyeurism is not rape, even though both involve violation. I say that not to minimize voyeurism but to distinguish." He

Orthodox girls who are constantly being watched and commented on are experiencing a form of voyeurism.

was trying to be nice, to give me advice about how to get guys to be less hostile. So I would just like to note that I'm really over men telling me I should change what I have to say in order to accommodate what some men are possibly willing to hear. I'm done with that.

Nevertheless, his message got me thinking. The idea that voyeurism necessarily involves women who are naked is, I think, too narrow a definition. It's not about women's nudity, but women's privacy. Someone who stands in your yard with binoculars aimed at your bedroom window is peeping, whether or not he actually catches you in a state of undress–and you will likely have the same feelings of unsafety either way. Mostly, though, it got me thinking about **Madonna**. The whole world has seen Madonna naked. And yet, she still experiences unwanted sharing of photos of her body as a painful invasion. It's not always about contact. And it doesn't necessarily involve nudity. What it involves is a man thinking of a woman's body as his to watch, measure, glare at, comment on, photograph or share, independent of the woman's desires. It's the idea that a view of a woman's body belongs to someone else other than the woman herself.

All this reinforces my point: Orthodox girls who are constantly being watched and commented on are experiencing a form of voyeurism. We must stop viewing women's bodies as part of the communal landscape and let women experience our bodies as our own.

Similar violations—unwanted looking, rather than uninvited touching—have been in the news with the reports surfacing of another rabbi outed as a voyeur, albeit of a slightly different sort. The parallels are clear for us to observe. This rabbi, **Jonathan Rosenblatt**, has been described in the New York Times and subsequently in the Jewish Week as having, for decades, invited pre-adolescent boys and young men to join him in a sauna and shower. Interesting in that he apparently did not typically touch the boys. He "just" asked them to strip naked, and many of the boys (now adults) describe what it meant for him to be looking at them up and down in their own vulnerability. This is what I have been writing about since the Freundel scandal: That we must pay more attention to the impact of sexual abuse that does not involve touching: non-violent, or non-contact sexual abuse. True, it's not rape. But we shouldn't let that statement lure us into the complacency that the damage isn't real. Emotional abuse can be a very damaging thing. Emotional-sexual abuse can play with victims' minds and spirits in very painful ways.

ELENA SZTOKMAN

PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/LARSJUH

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SWEEPING THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST

Israeli Sisters' Viral Music Video

A music video on YouTube sped from the Israeli desert to Yemen and through the Middle East. Its stars, sisters **Tair**, **Liron** and **Tagel Haim** (not to be confused with L.A.'s three-sister rock band Haim) became immediate celebrities.

Going by the name A-WA (pronounced Ay-wa, Arabic for "yes"), the young women sing in Arabic, wear bright pink dresses and head scarves, and tear through the desert in a Yemeni jeep. Then they dance-battle three guys (potential suitors?) wearing matching blue Adidas tracksuits. "Habib Galbi," viewed over 500,000 times in the first two weeks of its release, layers Yemenite melodies over hip-hop beats, creating a danceable fusion of Middle Eastern musical traditions.

Descendants of Yemeni immigrants on their father's side, the Haim sisters grew up in a small desert village in the Arava Valley in southern Israel and fell in love with their grandparents' Yemeni-Arabic music, sung by women for generations. It's no wonder A-WA has been gaining popularity in the Arab world, even getting posted on the "Mipsterz" (Arab Hipsters) Facebook page. We're counting down to the release of their debut album.

From **Avishay Artsy**, "The Israeli Sisters Whose Music Video is Sweeping Across the Arab World," *thejewniverse.com*, March 23, 2015.

DECADES AFTER A CAMPUS RAPE

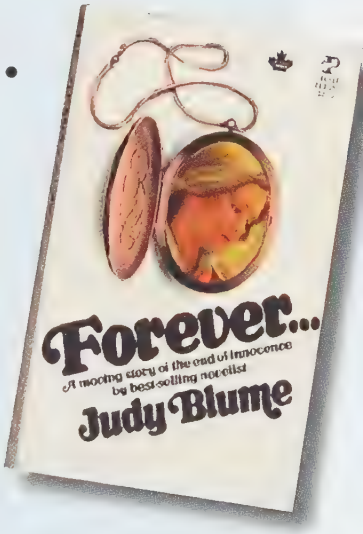
It's hard not to wonder now, from my perch of more than a quarter century later, staring at the pinched look on my face in the photos from that rainy graduation morning, why there hadn't been a third option besides either pressing charges or doing nothing, neither of which felt like an appropriate reaction to what had happened to me in that bed.

I did not want my date rapist to go to jail for what had happened between us. ...I didn't even want him not to graduate. I wanted to confront him in a safe place in front of others. I wanted him to understand that what he did to me—penetration against my will—was wrong, really wrong! I wanted him to express remorse for having crossed a moral and legal line, so that if and when he ever raised a son, he could teach him not to cross it.

From **Deborah Copaken**, "Entering the Mind of My Rapist: An Exercise in Extreme Empathy," *thenation.com*, May 15, 2015.

"I can remember a couple of angry women—angry because K had orgasms. They didn't think that was realistic. I did."

Judy Blume in response to a fan who asked about her perpetually banned 1975 novel *Forever*. *mic.com*, May 27, 2015.



A-WA PHOTO BY TOMER YOSEF

the Samovar

by CLARE GOLDFARB

My samovar, which now sits in the center of my living room, always rested on a little table in the corner of my parents' dining room. It's a no-nonsense peasant affair, barrel-shaped and made of brass. It stands 18 inches high and has a round drip bowl underneath its spout.

The samovar was central to Russian households. A source of cultural pride, it was invariably put in a place of honor. The Russian expression "to have a sit by the samovar" meant to have tea in the company of a talk. Often a long talk. Sometimes a talk that was understood, from the get-go, to be one that would settle differences and be conciliative.

I love tea, but I've never had a cup from my samovar…and neither has anyone else in my family for at least a hundred years. Instead, my samovar serves stories, the first being the tale about my paternal grandmother's disapproval of my father's fiancée. His roots were Hungarian, but my mother's were—so disappointingly—Russian.

"What is Gertrude's background?" my grandmother asked my father as she assessed his bride-to-be.

"She's Russian," my father said.

My grandmother harrumphed. "She'll sit around all day by the samovar, just drinking tea now, won't she?"

My grandmother's disapproval did not nix the marriage, however, though she and my mother never got along. Until her dying day, my Hungarian-born grandmother looked down on my American-born mother because of her alleged "samovar habits."

My mother and I talked with each other all the time, but somehow I never asked about the samovar's provenance, though I did ask why we never used it.

My mother sighed.

"Because it doesn't have a teapot," she explained.

Apparently when our family moved from Washington Heights, in New York City, to Mount Vernon, New York, where my parents lived for most of their adult lives, the teapot went missing. They unpacked all the boxes and looked high and low, looked everywhere, but the brass teapot that sat atop the samovar had disappeared.

The teapot would have held a brew of black concentrated tea leaves called *zavarka*. The protocol for a true Russian cup of tea was to fill the samovar with water and then heat it up by burning charcoal in the samovar's funnel-shaped core. One lit the charcoal from the bottom grilled opening above the spout. Meanwhile, the teapot, filled with *zavarka*, heated up, too. One poured as much *zavarka* as one wanted into one's cup, then added hot water to taste.

After the teapot disappeared from my parents' life, my mother relegated the samovar to the living room corner and just boiled water on the stove top. Still, I loved the samovar as a girl, and my mother knew it. When I got married, she bequeathed it to me. Wherever I've lived since, it has sat in a place of honor.

Some years after my marriage, a new friend was visiting, and, like all new visitors to our home, she admired the samovar.

"It's authentic," she said. "'Made in Tula in 1879.'"

"How do you know?" I asked.

"It says so." She pointed to the faded decoration and Cyrillic script embossed on the front; she was able to read and understand Russian.

When I told my mother about its authenticity, she just nodded her head.

"Of course," she said.

"But I always thought it was just a copy you bought from some antiques dealer once upon a time."

"Not at all!" she said. "I got it from one of my mother's sisters, or half-sisters. I forget. My mother's father was married a second time. Aunt Yetta was a lunatic."

"Why did she give it to you?"

My mother made a face.

"She didn't *give* it to me, Clare. I had to buy it for a dollar." She paused. "But she *should* have given it to me. She had absolutely promised. When I was little, and we all lived on the Lower East Side, we visited Aunt Yetta a lot; she lived nearby. I was her favorite niece because I was the only one who would talk to her in Yiddish. I could speak Russian, Yiddish and English, but every time I spoke Yiddish or Russian in the house, my mother would slap me. 'We're in America,' she would shout. 'We speak English!'"

My mother had lost her Russian, but she remained fluent in Yiddish.

She went back to her tale.

"Aunt Yetta wouldn't go to night school like everyone else in the family, and nobody wanted anything to do with her. To us, she was a fanatic, wearing a *sheytl*, not turning on the lights on *shabbos*. She'd sit in the dark. My mother made me run over to Aunt Yetta's on Fridays to light candles with her and make sure she had supper.

"I would talk to her. I was nice. She'd say, 'Miriam Gitl'—no one else still called me that—'you're such a good little girl, but I got no *gelt* to pay you for this. So when you grow up, you'll get married and I'll give you this samovar.' She always said that.

"The samovar stood by the shabbos candles we would light together. I loved how it shone when we *benched licht*. She would tell me how the samovar belonged to our family in Odessa. 'I carried it over in a pillowcase,' she'd say. 'I was sick all the way, but I held close the samovar.' All of that in Yiddish."

"So why didn't she give it to you when you got married?"

"I hadn't visited her in years," my mother said. "And she wouldn't come to my wedding because it wasn't Orthodox. After my wedding, though, I visited her and asked right away about the samovar. I mean, it was a promise. She was over 80, ancient and bent. Then again, she was ancient and bent when she was 50.

"I gave her a hug and we talked about the samovar. 'I'm old now, Giteleh,' she said. 'I could live to be a hundred. I have to watch out for my future. Give me a dollar and you can have the samovar.'

"Of course, I gave her a dollar, but it wasn't right. She had made a promise."

After I was married, as I already said, the samovar, minus its teapot, came to live in my house. I kept it brightly shined, and it was in pristine condition until my daughter was two. She was a climber, and one day she managed to climb up on the table and knock the samovar off, on top of herself. She howled, split her lip, chipped a tooth, and dented the samovar. The lip healed, the baby tooth eventually fell out, but the samovar stayed dented.

"I love tea, but I've never had a cup from my samovar...and neither has anyone else in my family for a hundred years. Instead, my samovar serves stories."

I took it to several restorers, all of whom shook their heads regretfully and said they couldn't fix it. One man, looking particularly pained, turned the samovar around and around and around.

"You realize this dent destroys the value, to say nothing of the aesthetics, don't you?"

He kept shaking his head. "How did it happen?"

"My daughter knocked it off the table," I said, and then, sensing his indifference, added, "She's little. She really bruised herself."

He exhaled deeply.

"I don't have children," he said.

That reminded me of a story a friend of mine used to tell about a valuable Persian carpet whose corner was chewed up by her puppy. When she took it to the best restorer in town, he was horrified.

"Kill the dog," he advised.

As for me, I live with the dent. When people visit, they always comment on the samovar's beauty. Then they ask about the dent. Soon there are tales, more tales than mine—about children's mischief, beloved, inherited possessions, about accidents and losses.

And so, indeed, my father's mother was right.

We still enjoy long sits by the samovar.

Clare Goldfarb, retired as University Professor, dean, and chair of the English department at Western Michigan University, now lives in Atlanta. She has published widely in journals and is the co-author of Spiritualism and Nineteenth Century Letters.

Single Jewish Male Seeks...

fiction by
LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN

Zach pilfered an issue of New York magazine from the dentist's waiting room and answered every ad in the "Women Seeking Men" columns that included the words "Single Jewish Female," "SJF," or just "Jewish." Many women were seeking men who were "smart, funny, and financially secure." Several described themselves as "clever and curvaceous" or "slim and spunky." A few of the seekers he met through those listings were all those things; others deserved to be sued for false advertising. When they showed up at the appointed wine bar or cafe, Zach knew almost immediately that they were wrong for him—the brunette who came to brunch in blue eye shadow and chandelier earrings; the alarmingly skinny woman who ordered a Cobb salad and picked out the cheese; the sophisticate who said she loved jazz but looked blank when he mentioned Thelonius Monk.

After six or seven duds, Zach decided to reverse the process and write his own ad. Unsure how to describe himself and still be likable, he sought inspiration in the magazine's "Men Seeking Women" columns:

"Venture capitalist with global interests, youthful fifty-six, seeks slender, cerebral vixen who can make me laugh, loves dogs, is mysterious, complex, and can karaoke!"

"Scott Fitzgerald searching for his Zelda. You should be witty and wear pearls to bed. Neuroses forgiven if you read *Gatsby* at least twice."

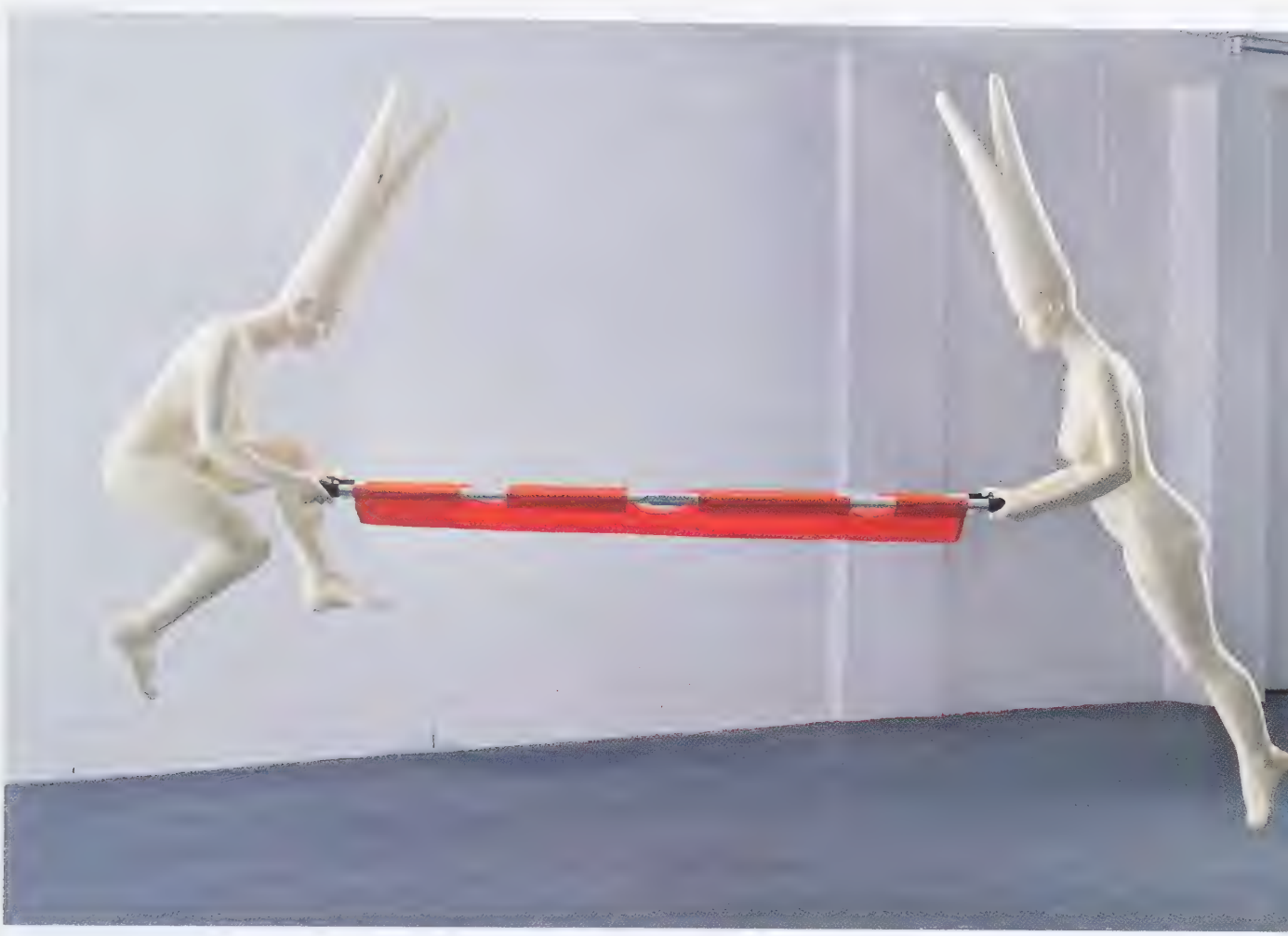
"I'm easy; all you have to be is over five foot eight, under 120 lbs., down-to-earth, and rich. Divorced okay, but no kids, please."

"You: intelligent but not pompous, attractive but not vain, affectionate but not needy. Me: brainy but not overbearing, secure but not arrogant, sexually adventurous but not kinky."

Zach wondered how a woman must feel reading these absurdly exacting demands, but the nervy specificity of the men's ads emboldened him. Two hours and four heavily edited, handwritten, legal-sized pages later, he called the magazine's classified department and dictated the following copy:

SJM, 38, lawyer, 6'1", seeking SJF, 28–35, for permanent relationship. Me: left wing, athlete, dad of one (want more), nonobservant Jew but committed to Jewish survival. You: intelligent, sporty, family-minded, comfortably Jewish. Nonsmokers only. Include letter and photo.

Listening to the ad clerk read his copy back to him, Zach had a Groucho Marx moment: he could not imagine being interested in the sort of woman who'd be interested in anyone who could write such an ad. It had no edge, nothing witty or artful, no spicy innuendos. Yet



"HOW FAR WOULD YOU RUN WITH A PIECE OF LEAD IN YOUR HEART?," ESTHER NAOR, 2014.

he recognized the man it described. To hell with edge, he decided. His ad was accurate. Better an empty mailbox than a fake pitch.

As any woman in the western world could have predicted, his mailbox was swamped. Professors, doctors, lawyers, a fitness instructor, a museum director, an architect, a travel consultant, even a Jewish airline pilot, they all wanted to meet Zach and have his children. He pored over every letter and photo but the packet that kept landing at the top of the pile came from a young woman with the comical name of Babka Tanenbaum, who described herself as a "performance artist." She had enclosed a photo of herself dressed as a Hasidic man, above the caption, "Babka Channels Yentl the Yeshiva Boy." Her costume—black coat, black hat, ear curls, tallis—couldn't disguise the fact that she was disarmingly lovely.

If you like what you see, come up and introduce yourself after the show. Otherwise, you can slink out and I'll never know I was rejected.

Cross-dressing was the least of Babka Tanenbaum's religious transgressions. Instead of a regulation tallis with fringes, hers ended in red ostrich feathers. She carried what looked like an etrog and lulav, ritual objects associated with the harvest holiday of Sukkot, but rather than the unblemished citron prescribed by Jewish law, her "etrog" was a misshapen grapefruit encircled by a crown of thorns. And instead of the regulation lulav, which is supposed to be composed of palm, myrtle, and willow stalks gathered into a simple sheaf, her stalks were bound in the shape of a cross. Rabbi Goldfarb would be apoplectic but Zach could not resist Babka's introductory note:

Hi SJM,

I'm a Barnard graduate, a thirty-four-year-old recovering investment banker turned performance artist and, as you can see in the enclosed photograph, Jewish themes are central to my work. Though some consider me heretical, my quarrel is not with Judaism, only with its sanctimony and sexism.

My "Yentl" piece was inspired by the first woman ever to run for a seat on a religious council in Israel (see tallis). The way the Orthodox machers treated her (see payess), you'd have thought she was a transvestite applying for the job of Chief Rabbi. The black hats nearly crucified her (see thorns and lulav) but she won (see ostrich feathers).

I went to a yeshiva and grew up Conservadox so I know a lot about Judaism, but I prefer to express my spirituality through my art. Feel free to check out my latest performance piece this Saturday night at the Broome Street Theater at 10 p.m. No admission fee. If you like what you see, come up and introduce yourself after the show. Otherwise, you can slink out and I'll never know I was rejected.

P.S. I want four kids.

• • •

After her performance, Babka returned wearing an Indian-style chamois dress the color of butterscotch, a silver necklace studded with turquoise stones, beaded moccasins, her hair plaited in two thick braids, hardly the average person's idea of street clothes. Zach gave her a thumbs up.

"Your Pocahontas is even better than your Yentl."

For the better part of an hour the two of them sat in the vacant theater passing the vodka bottle between them while Babka peppered Zach with questions that none of his countless blind dates had ever asked. Did he ever experience anti-Semitism? Cheat on an exam? Consider suicide? Zach answered each query honestly, no slick fibs or exaggerations. If she turned out to be his bashert, he wanted her to see him for the person he was. "Cheated, once, on an algebra test," he said. "I'd been out with the mumps when the unit was taught and never made up the class."

"Shoplift?"

Thinking back to the stores on Kingsbridge Road, he shook his head, "Most of the shopkeepers in my neighborhood were refugees like my parents. How could I stiff them?"

"Anti-Semitism?" she prodded.

"A kid called Brendan Riley once threw a handful of pennies at me and shouted 'Go fetch.' I'd never heard the stereotype about Jews and money. Every Jew I knew was poor."

Babka smiled, tippled the vodka bottle, was quiet for a minute, then bit her lip. "Ever want to kill yourself?"

He looked at her. "Never," he said, firmly, then, as if his reply needed a rational justification, added, "My parents were survivors."

Babka's eyes widened. "No way! Mine, too. Mom, Dachau. Dad, Theresienstadt. Yours?"

Crossdressing was the least of Babka Tanenbaum's religous transgressions. Intead of a regulation tallis with fringes, hers ended in red ostrich feathers.

Zach sighed. "Mom, Auschwitz."

"The way I look at it," Babka said, "being a survivor's kid is a reason to kill yourself. Didn't you hate being defined by your parents' tragedies?"

"I still define myself that way," he admitted.

She took his hand. "What do you say we move the party to my place?"

Though Babka's one-room studio on The Bowery, a fifth floor walk-up, had a double height ceiling, its ambiance was that of a crowded, chaotic Middle Eastern souk. Kilim rugs were thrown helter-skelter across the floors and every piece of furniture—sofa, tables, chairs, hassocks, everything but the radiator—was topped by some color-saturated cloth. Yellow fabric studded with tiny mirrors draped the three windows on one wall. A huge skylight composed of long glass panels filled the slanted portion of the roof looming above a queen-sized bed that was flanked by two end tables swathed in madras material. The bed was covered by a furry throw that, in a former life, could have been a llama, and scattered along its headboard was a row of throw pillows clad in jewel-toned silks.

The decor was dazzling, but it was more like a Gypsy tent, not a Jewish home. A person couldn't light Hanukkah candles here without singeing some schmatta, and there was no room for a toy box, much less a crib or a changing table.

Just then a door swung open and a stocky black man bounded out of the bathroom wearing only a towel.

"Yo, Babs," he said, jauntily. "I thought I heard voices."

"Charles, meet Zach. Old friend, new friend. Zach, Charles." Babka toggled her thumbs at each man. She couldn't have been more nonchalant about the encounter. The half-naked man, equally sanguine, whipped a wave in Zach's direction before crossing the room to retrieve a large-toothed comb from the pocket of the Knicks jacket hanging over the back of a chair, then whistled his way back to the bathroom. "Charles lives in the bowels of Brooklyn and plays sax in a club down the street," Babka explained, "so when he needs a shower between sets, he comes here. Always calls first, but if I'm not

"THERE WASN'T A MAN, WOMAN, OR CHILD I COULD LIFT A FINGER FOR," ESTHER NAOR, 2014.

home, I've always told him he can use his key."

Zach consciously decided not to be judgmental but to simply admire Babka for her generosity. Still, when she opened the louvered doors on the far wall exposing a kitchen alcove, he was relieved. He wanted her to be normal. She might have a naked man in her bathroom, but she had a sink, stove, and refrigerator like other people. She was literate enough to send-up haiku poetry and Jewish enough to quote the Talmud. They had survivor parents in common. She knew CPR. She could save their children's lives. Wait, he told his galloping thoughts, stop getting ahead of yourself.

Charles emerged from the bathroom wearing black pants and a chartreuse shirt with the tails out. He slipped his arms into the Knicks jacket, tossed off another wave, then mimed a jazzman cradling a saxophone and played himself out the door. Zach couldn't help but wonder how many other men had Babka Tanenbaum's key.

"Drink?" she asked.

"Beer would be great."

"For future reference, what's your brand?"

Future reference. She was getting ahead of herself, too.

"Heineken, thanks." He lowered himself into one of her overstuffed armchairs.

"Favorite time of day?" she asked.

"Sunset. You ask a lot of questions for a non-lawyer."

"Questions save time."

She went to the alcove and brought back two bottles of Corona, probably the last guy's brand.

"When do I get to ask you questions?" Zach leaned back in the chair.

"Now." A small, round ottoman that looked like a pincushion on steroids was suddenly wedged between his legs with Babka on it, her knees a few inches from his crotch. She smiled. "What do you want to know?"

Zach wanted to know everything about her, but her close proximity threw him. "What's your greatest regret?"

"That I'm not good at sports. Same question to you; greatest regret?"

Where to begin? Zach thought. Making a huge vow when he was too young to know what he'd agreed to. Losing his marriage. Letting Anabelle go. Leaving Cleo. Having to find "the right kind of woman" rather than to simply fall in love.

"Not meeting you five years ago," he replied, his one glib line of the night.

"Trust me," Babka said. "Five years ago I wasn't worth meeting."

Zach set his Corona on the side table, took hold of Babka's braids and gently pulled her face toward him. Her lips weren't Cleo's. Maybe it was too soon. He let go of her hair. "What's with your funny name?"

"It means fir tree." She shot him a teasing glance.

"I didn't mean Tanenbaum."

"Ohhh! Babka?" She laughed, exaggerating her delayed comprehension. "It's a coffee cake."

"I know it's a coffee cake. My folks came from Kraków, the birthplace of babka."

"Wrong. It originated in Russia. As an Easter cake. It took Polish Jews to add the good stuff—nuts, raisins, rum. Which reminds me: how about a rum and Coke?"

Zach said he would stick with beer. She withdrew her knees from between his legs, went to the refrigerator, pulled out a Coke, and carried it over to the bed, which puzzled him until she shoved aside the multi-colored pillows and opened a sliding panel in the headboard to reveal a hidden compartment containing about a dozen different liquors and whiskeys. Zach's father used to keep one squat bottle of Manischewitz on the kitchen counter for Friday night kiddush and one round bottle of plum brandy, called Slivovitz, on a top shelf in the coat closet, to be tapped only for a toast on Rosh Hashana. A fifth of Slivovitz could last the Levys a decade.

If her copious supply was a shock to Zach, Babka's intake was stunning. She'd guzzled vodka at the theater and polished off her beer while he still had half of his left in the bottle. Now, he almost had a coronary when he noted how much rum she poured in her glass of Coke. Maybe she was drinking to compensate for a secret shyness or performance anxiety. Maybe she was under pressure to pass muster with Zach whose ad, despite his efforts to the contrary, may have sounded too exacting. Or perhaps the last guy, the one who drank Corona, had recently dumped her and the booze was dulling the pain.

She sat on the edge of the mattress with her glass. "My birth certificate says Barbara but I'm told my father used to say I was sweet as babka and the nickname stuck with me. Which is more than I can say for my dad."

Zach joined her on the llama spread and draped his arm over her shoulder. "You look sad."

"I was remembering Wharton's quote: 'Life is either a tightrope or a featherbed.'"

"Which is it for you?" he asked.

"Tightrope. You?"

Tightrope was Zach's answer, too, but he said featherbed as a prelude to tipping her backward onto the many-colored pillows. He unbuttoned her chamois dress and thrilled when his fingers met no straps or hooks, just warm, bare skin. He glanced down at her chest. The flattering amber light from the bedside lamp did nothing to soften the impact of the tattoo inked in blue above her left nipple—a six-pointed Jewish star with the name "Tom" at its center. ■

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a founding editor of Ms. magazine, is a writer, lecturer, social justice activist, and the author of eleven books, including Deborah, Golda and Me. *This is excerpted from her new novel,* Single Jewish Male Seeking Soul Mate *(The Feminist Press, 2015).*

Israeli artist Esther Naor, whose work graces Lilith's fiction in this issue, says, "I'm interested in issues of identity, social behavior, and physical and mental borders, but I always take something very personal as a point of departure...my family's immigration from Iraq and integration in Israel, the tension and conflicts involved in my being both a mother and an artist, and personal traumas which influenced my artistic work." Her work is on view through January 2016 at Beit Hatfutzot, in Tel Aviv. *esthernaor.com*

I Am A Cancer

by LAURIE H. RUBEL

Cancer runs in my father's family. Around the time I was born, cancer swept through my paternal grandmother's generation, leaving no women behind. Among its victims was my grandmother, Hadassah Rubel, a beloved Hebrew and music teacher in her Queens Jewish community. She died of ovarian cancer at age 58, about two years shy of my birth: I was given her name to honor her memory. We are connected through that name, and through the songs that she taught her son, my father—and also in more invisible, genetic ways.

When the next generation came of age, the cancer trend again showed its face. My father's only sister, Susan Rubel, my Aunt Suzi, first endured breast cancer and a mastectomy in her 40s, only to be ravaged by ovarian cancer a decade later. Like the women in the generation before her, she too was a teacher, a reminder that the tendency toward cancer is not the only thing that is in our genes. This familial tendency toward cancer became quantified when my aunt's doctors identified a mutation in her BRCA1 gene, a mutation associated with increased risks of breast and ovarian cancer. She had inherited it from her mother, and this finding rippled through the family.

Here's a macabre math problem: what are the chances, in a family of three children, that only one child, or in this case, only Suzi, had received the mutation? Both of my aunt's brothers had the genetic test; one was spared from this and the other, my father, was not. My father's DNA has the same BRCA1 mutation, giving *l'dor va'dor*, from generation to generation, new meaning for me and for my siblings. With this information, I was told that I had either inherited this mutation or, with equal likelihood, had not. I debated getting tested—there is no cure for a BRCA1 mutation. You can't change it. Besides, each of us will die, at some point and in some way. Why try to forecast the details? Why might I, or anyone, want to know more than that?

My timeline at **36:**

5 years for tenure;

4 years of fertility left;

3 years before bilateral mastectomy.

At the time I faced the decision about whether to have the genetic test, cancer was overpowering my beloved aunt, and she was clearly not going to survive. She had spent the last decade of her young life struggling with disease and would leave behind two twentysomething sons and a loving husband. Her cancer was unstoppable, and our family was forced to continue on without her. My two daughters (not my genetic offspring, a fact relevant here only in this tale of genetics) were six months and 10 years old at the time, and I wanted the dots of my own timeline to be connected differently from Suzi's. I figured that knowing if I carried this mutation would enable me to make wiser decisions to try to keep myself healthy. I didn't want my own story to have the same heartbreaking ending. And, of course, an essential component in choosing to undergo genetic testing is the hope of learning you have been spared.

Within a week's time, I learned that I, too, have the BRCA1 mutation, known as 185delAG. News but not new; the newness was knowing about it. This particular mutation, a missing piece in the 185th position of a very long strand of DNA, has been a part of every one of my cells from the very start.

Increased risks of breast and ovarian cancer mean what? We take risks every time we leave our homes. What's a little more risk? But an 80–90% chance of developing breast cancer doesn't sound as much like a risk as it does a near sure thing. Many people survive breast cancer, like my mother (who does not have a BRCA1 mutation), and go on to live otherwise healthy lives. However, treatments effective for breast cancer typically are not effective on the tumors common in the cancers that women with BRCA1 mutations develop. As if the high breast cancer rates are not enough, women with this BRCA1 mutation have about a 50% lifetime chance of developing *ovarian* cancer. And because ovarian cancer is difficult to detect until after it has spread, it is usually lethal.

Where did my newly acquired knowledge about my genes leave me? I could

Previvor

hope that the cancerous cells never grow, watch very carefully, aim to catch any cancer quickly and then treat it. This plan sounds stressful, but many women sensibly go this "surveillance" route. But there is a catch. The surveillance relies on mammography and MRIs, and these cannot be undergone during pregnancy. Doctors looked me squarely in the eye and expressed great concern about my going forward with a pregnancy, at age 36 with this BRCA1 mutation. Since pregnancy releases hormones into the body that trigger breast growth, they recommended that if I wanted to birth a baby I should first have a bilateral mastectomy. Once I finished any and all childbearing, they said I should then have my ovaries removed. Oh, and if the extent of all of this wasn't enough, the doctors also cautioned that optimally the target finish date of all this should be no later than age 40.

With this news, I was facing three overlapping timelines. As a university professor, I was working to produce publications and earn grants as part of a challenging five-year tenure timeline. As a 36-year-old woman, my fertility clock was nearing alarm mode. And most significantly, there was this new timeline, with the highest stakes. Genetic cancer specialists were not neutral about my position. They pleaded with me to do all that was possible, right away, to try to prevent the cancer from ever getting started in my body.

Can you imagine doctors advising you to quickly and preemptively cut off parts of your healthy body? Some friends expressed disbelief that I would even consider it. In that first year, during regular visits to the cancer hospital for the surveillance appointments, I sat in beautifully appointed waiting rooms and faced women visibly ill with cancer. I was an imposter, a patient in a cancer center who didn't have cancer. I felt lucky to have choices, choices that eluded these women.

An 80–90% chance of developing breast cancer doesn't sound as much like a risk as it does a near sure thing.

And so, before my 37th birthday, with either bravery or cowardice (I still don't know which), I underwent a bilateral mastectomy. And I still don't know how to tell people casually about this decision, the experience, the physical pain and recovery, the trauma of losing these body parts. It was awkward. I had not been sick; the surgery was prophylactic, entirely a matter of prevention. I struggled for words to explain something so private and so personal to colleagues and even to friends.

Some misjudged the situation. When I returned to work, a male colleague who knew about the surgery handed me a gift box. At first I was touched he had made a gesture of kindness. I was then horrified to open it and discover chocolate lollipops in the shape of breasts. He had missed the point entirely. This isn't about breasts. It's about life, and about navigating difficult choices. I've heard of women holding "boob voyage" parties prior to a mastectomy, and I respect any way to gather community to support and mark this significant event. But guys, here's a hint: make sure you're actually invited to the party before you break out the boob lollipops.

After my body healed from the mastectomy, I moved on to project pregnancy. I struggled for nearly a year to get pregnant. Every failed attempt was complicated with tinges of grief over what I had lost in pursuit of trying to bear children. I was blessed, so blessed, to eventually get pregnant and bear a son, and then a second son, all by age 40. My process of earning tenure was successful too, though dwarfed in perspective by these grander matters.

The final step remained, another prophylactic surgery. This time it was to remove my ovaries and fallopian tubes, and was supposedly going to be the easier one. Ovaries are tiny, and they can be removed with very small incisions, performed by robotic instruments. Ovaries, I was told, were not necessary or significant beyond childbearing. But surgical menopause (they don't call it radical for nothing) brings with it a host of side effects and risks, only some of which are deeply understood by doctors today. After all, it is a new thing for a young healthy woman to have her ovaries removed. Normally, women's hormonal levels change very gradually and their ovaries produce a range of hormones even after menopause.

My ovaries were taken and all ovarian hormone production with them.

Doctors simply do not have the aggregation of data yet to have anything close to comprehensive knowledge about the host of trade-offs here. For example, they warn that with the exit of my ovaries, I have invited increased risks of osteoporosis and heart disease. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can replace some of the hormones that the body produces with synthetic substitutes, safer for me since I had a mastectomy and can worry less about breast cancer. The HRT helps with hot flashes and sleeplessness, but there are other effects of radical menopause that the HRT is not alleviating. There is more to the mix of the body's hormones than what is replaced with standard HRT.

I feel as if the prophylactic removal of these organs has not only cut these supposedly nonessential, female parts out of me, but also that it has changed me—spiritually, experientially, of course, but also chemically and biologically—in essential ways. I traded in parts of my body, parts of me, as a way to take charge of my genetic destiny. I did this from a fortunate position of health. I look in the mirror and see someone familiar, but my brain just does not think like the brain it was before.

Since the oopherectomy, the removal of my ovaries, I struggle to remember details, names and words, all things I excelled at before. I have difficulty learning new information, strange for a person whose profession is academic scholarship. Where I once was an avid reader, often unwinding at the end of the day with a novel, I have not been able to read a book for pleasure since that operation. The words swim on the page, I have difficulty focusing, and I can't piece together the details of a story, no matter how gripping or well written. I'm no longer comfortable with my body the way I used to be and cannot casually change my clothes in front of people the way I once did, which has turned pools and gyms into places of dread. When my boys were babies, I silently suffered through self-righteous lectures about the long-term health benefits of breastfeeding by people who noticed me bottle-feeding my sons.

And there is no guarantee that my actions have prevented me from ever getting cancer. Cancer could still grow in my epithelial cells or in breast cells that were left behind, or somewhere else in my body. I continue to be regularly screened at the cancer center.

Despite all of these drawbacks, at age 45 I remain cancer free. I am here, to smell the lilacs of the spring and to watch my children grow. So many other brave women who are facing cancer do not have this good fortune. Every follow-up visit back to the cancer center reminds me in a vivid way just how lucky I am. I took painful measures with drastic consequences and difficult tradeoffs, but was there really a choice? Maybe I chose life, or maybe I was just choosing Not Cancer. I am thankful for my wise doctors and grateful for their care. And yet, how can prophylactic surgeries be our best answer?

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We need new terminology for people in this position. Doctors might call me an "unaffected carrier," since I have a BRCA1 mutation but have not had cancer. This term seems wildly inaccurate. The language is important, because the terminology brings with it protective laws related to disability, insurance, and medical research. Hence the term "previvor"—an individual who is a survivor of a predisposition to cancer but has not had the disease—coined by Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE), an organization to improve the lives of individuals and families affected by hereditary breast and ovarian cancer.

The field of genetic research is so new that it makes me a pioneer of sorts, navigating a little-charted terrain. Increased funding for research is needed, research that has to produce responses better than prophylactic surgeries. Looking back over the layers of decisions I made, I am not saying that I would do it any differently. I likely avoided having breast cancer with toddlers in tow, a cancer that likely would not have been stoppable. The idea that I will be able to be a mother to my children even as they become adults, a partner to my spouse as we grow older, and to work longer toward *tikkun olam,* repairing the world, validates all the choices I made. But there was a serious price, a price that can be overlooked in the characterization of breasts and ovaries as non-essential body parts. I continue to pray that I will avoid the experience of having ovarian cancer and be able to live a longer life than so many other women in my family. I hope my story will help other women think through their own choices and that my voice will communicate the urgency that we not be satisfied with these prophylactic surgeries as our best response. Breasts and ovaries are essential parts of a female body, and we can all hope that medical responses to genetic cancer mutations recognize their importance, and offer us better—and less wrenching—options. ■

Laurie Rubel lives in New York with her family and is on the faculty of the City University of New York. An earlier version of this essay appeared at kveller.com.

Women with this breast cancer mutation

have about a **50%**

lifetime chance

of developing ovarian cancer also.

Bride Price

ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, 1926

by RUTH MASON

I am sitting beside my mother's bed where she now spends all her days, hearing the story of her betrothal for the very last time. Her apartment is on Tchernichovsky Street, in Jerusalem's Rasco neighborhood, facing the olive tree-studded Valley of the Cross and the hill topped by the sprawling, white complex that is the Israel Museum. It is 1999.

As usual, I've pulled one of the padded, green-metal kitchen chairs up next to her bed. It is mid-afternoon and a rectangle of sun rests on my mother's blanket, warming her knees. As she talks, I add small details, and she asks, "How you know that?" in her broken English.

"*Eema*," I say. "I've heard this story my whole life."

"Oh. Really?"

She couldn't have forgotten that she's told me this, but the narrative remains one that she still can't seem to wrap her head around—even now, as she eases towards death. Perhaps she thinks that telling it one more time will somehow spring her from disbelief. Or is it trauma?

"You remember why we was in Alexandria?" she begins.

"Yes, Eema. The Turks threw you out of Jerusalem," I say.

"Can you believe they make me marry this way?" she asks, for the zillionth time.

"No, Eema. I cannot. I cannot believe they made you marry this way."

My mother is seven or eight, or maybe six, when her family—consisting of herself, her widowed mother, and her older brother (her father died shortly after the family made *aliyah* from Bukhara)—is exiled from Palestine to Egypt during World War I, along with thousands of others (including David Ben Gurion) who do not have Turkish citizenship.

She studies at the Alliance Israelite Universelle, part of an international group of liberal Jewish schools based on the values of the French Revolution and aimed at bringing "culture" to Eastern Jews. My mother's family is so impoverished, though, that she is forced to quit school after the eighth grade so she can bring in money.

"We was so poor that when I saw another child eating chocolate, I would close my eyes and try to taste what she was tasting."
"I know."

She is exceptionally proficient at embroidery and lacework, so she gets a job back at her own school, teaching girls almost her age. They sit in a circle.

"Around me are many girls that I have to show them. I already knew so well. You understand?"

One day in 1926, my mother's brother, Moshe Nissim ("Moses of the Miracles"—his mother added the second name when he survived a bout of childhood pneumonia) appears at the door of her classroom in the company of a debonair-looking man, someone she has never seen before. His name is Chai Moussaioff, her brother tells her. He's 44 and a gentleman. It is highly unusual for Moshe Nissim to interrupt her at her job.

(Here, reader, I must provide a little backstory.)

My father's family, the Moussaioffs, immigrated to Jerusalem from Bukhara in 1888. My father, Chai, the third child of Rabbi Shlomo and Esther Moussaioff, is five at the time. Rabbi Shlomo, my grandfather, is a wealthy merchant of precious stones, silks, teas, and spices. He is also a learned Jew. He'd been the student of the renowned Rabbi Chaim Gaon, a hasid of the kabbalistic Bet El school, and I imagine my grandfather was a very impressive student, as he later became Rabbi Chaim's son-in-law.

On one of his not infrequent trips from Bukhara to Jerusalem, Rabbi Shlomo buys a large tract of land outside the Old City walls, and, to encourage *aliyah*, he offers to sell parcels, at cost, to any member of his community willing to "ascend" to The Holy Land. He is one of the founders of the Bukharian Quarter, one of the earliest Jewish neighborhoods outside the Old City—only a short drive, in fact, from where I now sit with my mother. Unlike the other narrow, winding streets of Jerusalem, Rehovoth HaBukharim ("the wide spaces of the Bukharians") has straight, wide boulevards that are considered the height of luxury.

The neighborhood model, designed by a German engineer, consists of large buildings made from signature Jerusalem stone, surrounding a courtyard. My grandfather constructs "our" courtyard here: Besides building an apartment for his own family and apartments for extended family, too, he builds two apartments that are explicitly intended to be rented to the poor, a house of study for the community, and a synagogue (that to this day exists as something of a pilgrimage site, with round-the-clock *minyanim*). He also creates a garden comprised of dozens of species of exotic flora that becomes renowned, as does his extensive collection of rare kabbalistic manuscripts that are today housed at Bar Ilan University.

In any case, it is hard to make a living in Jerusalem, so my father's eldest brother heads to Paris, and Chai, my father, when he comes of age, petitions his father to do the same.

"First you must marry," his father tells him.

His parents find him a woman named Pnina and they leave for France. Pnina and my father proceed to produce five children.

"When Father lived in Jerusalem," my half-sister Vicki tells me later, "he was so religious that if he accidentally brushed up against a woman on the street, he washed his hands. Not once, Ruthie. Twice! But then, in Paris… he discovered women."

My father becomes a man of the world, visiting the United States often on business, becoming a naturalized US citizen, and learning eight languages. I know almost nothing about his first marriage—some say that Pnina was an undignified match for a scion of the clan Moussaioff—but I do know that after they divorce, my father has an affair with a French Jewish businesswoman and they have a son they name Leon. (I have another brother named Leon, too.) My father and this businesswoman stay together until Leon is one; then my father leaves Paris with all five of his and Pnina's children.

One day in Jerusalem—it is 1926 at this point—Chai takes a Shabbat afternoon walk to the home of a Bukharian friend whose daughter, it turns out, has just received a photo-postcard from a childhood friend who was exiled to Egypt during the Great War.

My father stands behind the divan as the photograph is passed hand-to-hand. The photo stops him short.

"That was my picture," my mother tells me. "Yes, Eema."

Here is a dark-eyed beauty, a vision all in white: thick, wavy, dark hair topped with a gauzy white cap, hair falling below the waist. Her filmy white dress reaching just below her knees; her legs covered, modestly, in white stockings. Even her shoes are white. She looks calmly, steadily, at the camera. Innocent, matter-of-fact.

"Who is this girl?" my father asks.

"Sivia Babayoff," his host answers. "The daughter of Chinee and Rabbi Yehuda, of blessed memory, who died before the war. Sivia's mother, a good, pious woman, took in other people's laundry here in Jerusalem so the family didn't go hungry."

My father is riveted. "Continue, please," he says.

"In 1915, the Turks, may their names be erased, came to Chinee's house, saying they wanted her son for the army. They

Sivia and Chai Moussaioff on their wedding day.

"A shidduch in return for our family's return to Jerusalem. It is agreed."

came to many Bukharians this way, as you know, Chai, but Chinee had only one son, so she refused. They put her in jail, but Rabbi Abbo intervened, so they released her. The condition was that she, and her children, leave the country that night, on the train from Jaffa to Alexandria."

My father is smitten by the photo. He wants this Sivia.

The mid-1920s is a down-time for my father financially. Though he deals in rare gems, he has no jewelry at the moment to offer as a bride price.

"You know how Abba was with money. Sometimes up. Sometimes down," my mother says.

His name is good, though, so he borrows jewelry from other dealers—family and friends. What woman, after all, can resist rubies and diamonds and pearls?

"He come right away to Alexandria. He doesn't wait."

Within the week, my father, dressed in his best three-piece suit and carrying the jewels and a letter of introduction from his friend, arrives in Alexandria. He drops his small suitcase at the Shepherd's Hotel and heads straight for the Bukharian synagogue where he knows he will find my mother's brother, Moshe Nissim, at morning prayers. With the name Moussaioff, my father needs no further introduction. Moshe Nissim's eyes light up when he hears it.

They go to a coffee house after *shacharit* and speak for a couple of hours. My father takes out the jewels—this part might be my own embellishment; I am no longer sure. A diamond ring, a gold bracelet, two strands of pearls, a ruby brooch, all set in fine 14- and 24-karat gold. He does not tell Moshe Nissim they are all borrowed.

My uncle is in shock—Is this a fairytale? A scion of the Moussaioff dynasty wants his impoverished teenaged sister's hand?—but they negotiate. A *shidduch* in return for my uncle's family's return to Jerusalem, an apartment, a job for himself, respectable support of his widowed mother. It is agreed. They push back their chairs, stand, shake hands, and go off to meet my unsuspecting mother.

"They came to the place where I was. It was afternoon...."

Sivia's back is to the door.

A student has just said, "No, teacher. That was too fast. Can you show me again?" and Sivia does, bending from her waist over the student's work, her shapely bottom filling the outline of her dress.

I am not certain here, but I think my father, the taller one, has an ivory-tipped walking stick and that he puts his finger to his lips. He is enjoying the scene. He thinks, 'She is not only beautiful from the front!' He also thinks, 'She looks the same age as the others, yet she is the teacher. I have chosen well.'

After a moment, my father gestures and Moshe Nissim leads him into the classroom.

"Sivio," my uncle calls, pronouncing it Bukharian-style, with the accent on the last syllable. Sivia straightens, turns around. She is puzzled by the intrusion. Her brother has never come to her classroom before. And who is this older, elegant gentleman? A gentleman he certainly is. She can tell by his regal suit, by the way that he holds himself.

She glances to make sure her girls are all busy stitching, then she curtsies.

"Abba, he say, 'I want to buy presents for my children. Will you help me?'"

She has no idea what this is about, but she looks at her brother who gives an assenting nod.

"I will be happy to," she says.

They shop for presents as soon as school is out. I wish I had asked my mother what they bought. She would certainly have remembered. I know that my father liked to buy silk stockings for Victoria, his favorite daughter, but what might he have bought for Bernard and Jack? for Rachelle and Henriette?

They stop at the *shouk* where my father buys a live carp for my grandmother to prepare in the family's tiny apartment.

Meanwhile...Moshe Nissim has rushed home to tell his mother everything. She listens with her hand on her heart. Could this be happening? A Moussaioff wants to marry her daughter?

"Good thing I didn't let that poor boy Kalantar have her!" she says.

Several hours later my father walks through the Babayoffs' door with a fish wrapped in newspaper. Fish, in Bukharian culture, has high metaphoric valence.

"You brought us fish, you brought us *mazal*!" my grandmother announces.

She takes the wrapped package from my father and puts it in the tin basin in the corner of the room. Moshe Nissim makes the introductions. She then returns to the fish, unwrapping the newspaper. A whole, meaty cod, bigger than she ever

could have bought. The silver scales shiny, the eyes bright. This fish was alive not an hour ago, she thinks. Truly, mazal.

My grandmother is shy in front of this dapper stranger who is closer in age to her than to her daughter. A Moussaioff. A prominent family. Wealthy. Learned. Leaders of the Bukharian Jerusalem community.

"You have brought a blessing into our house," she tells him, looking shyly at the floor.

"May you always know only blessings," my father says in return. He takes one of her hands and kisses it. My grandmother does not know what to do, how to react. No one has touched her since her husband Yehuda, *alav ha'shalom*, died 14 years earlier.

"Sit," she says, smoothing down her dress with both hands. "I'll make Turkish coffee, then we will enjoy this good fish."

She sends my mother to the pump for water and begins to scale the fish, holding it by its tail and scraping in long strokes away from her into the basin.

'This is from the Holy One, blessed be He,' she thinks. 'It could be the end of our troubles. Fourteen years I have worked to feed us. I have never bought a fish like this.' Her hands move joyfully and her heart rises within her.

Soon the small kitchen is filled with the aroma of fresh fish frying—thin slices cut with the bone. When it is brown and crisp, they eat it, glazed with a sauce of fresh lemon, minced garlic, and coriander leaves chopped fine.

"How long did the negotiation take?" I ask my mother.

"I don't know. I didn't know nothing. He come to us two times."

There is a good chance that my father brings lamb for pilau during this second visit, as this is a popular Bukharian rice dish that poor people, like my grandmother, would only have made with chicken. Chai presents my mother with the borrowed jewels and states that he wants her hand in marriage.

My mother is shocked. She has no idea that the gentleman has come for this. Here is a man her father's age. Confused, she looks to her mother. Her brother, of course, has already told their mother that Chai Moussaioff will bring them all back to Jerusalem, will care for her, and will find him a job and an apartment. They will be his family now.

"When he come the second time, I cry," my mother tells me. "I say, 'I don't want. I don't want to get married. I don't want a man like this.' My mother hug me, she say, 'Ochi mura'—*'I would die for you.'"*

"This means she would do anything for you, Eema, right?"

"Yes. She say, 'I wish you don't have to. I wish I could give myself instead.' She say to me, 'We're here. We'll never be able to go to Jerusalem.' She say, 'They big family. He bring us back to Jerusalem.'

"What could I do? We was poor. I was naïve, young, I didn't know. I don't forget this."

When my mother gets to this part of the story, I always try to put myself in her shoes: sold into an arranged marriage. To a stranger twice her age with five teenaged children. And she's a teenager, too! If she said No she would be responsible for her family's poverty, and perhaps worse, for keeping them in exile in Egypt. Fate has given her an opportunity. Can she really say no? Can she be selfish? He is a man she does not love.

"You want I should talk about my mother? Ha. My mother. She say, 'He from a good family. He take care of you. He bring us back to Jerusalem.' She say, 'He good. He bring us fish. Fish bring mazal.'

"When I cry, my mother also cry. She say, 'What we do here in Egypt?' My mother she sacrifice herself, never marry after my father die—she don't want us suffer from a stepfather. Blame my mother? I don't blame her; I feel sorry for her. I blame my brother.

"So in the end, I say, 'Okay, I sacrifice myself for my mother.'

"She hug me. She cry. I cry."

Moshe Nissim Babayoff, Chinee Babayoff, and Sivia Moussaioff

"You want I should talk about my mother? Ha. My mother."

My parents marry in Jerusalem in the presence of the American Consul General on December 25, 1926.

"Why was the American Consul there, Eema?" I ask.

"I think because Abba American citizen," she says. "And he Moussaioff."

"And how come he had American citizenship?"

"It's a long story. Another time."

"Eema, how did you feel when you got married?"

"How I feel? How you think *I feel?"*

She will not say more.

I take out the album and we look together, across the blanket, at their wedding photo. I try to read my mother's feelings from her expression, but her face hides more than it reveals. She looks serious, but then again one didn't smile in photographs in 1926 in Jerusalem. If I cover the rest of her features with my finger and just look at

her eyes, I see, perhaps, fear and sadness. But her body looks relaxed.

My father is in formal dress, with a white bowtie and something white dangling from his hand. A medal of some sort is pinned to his lapel; it was doubtless purchased.

"Abba, when he marry me, he was happy that he finish with his problems. Now he have wife, he have mother for his children. So he make two apartments for poor people, too, like his father do. Each have two rooms and a kitchen. In the Bukharian Quarter. My brother stay in one of those apartments when he marry Mazal.

"He take me to the consulate so I get American citizenship. He say, 'Don't talk. I talk for you.' He make me older. He tell them I'm 20."

I ask, "But did you love him?"

"I learn to love him," she says.

"Abba used to play cards with my mother and talk to her. He call her lachchak *[noodles in Judeo-Tajiki] because she made her own noodles.*

"From his mother, I never hear a bad word. From his children, I never hear a bad word. If you're good to someone, then he be good to you. That's what I think," she tells me.

I shift my chair and reach across to take my mother's hand, marveling at her generous youthful self. A teenage bride with five teenage children, in circumstances she didn't choose and didn't want. How did she rise to such empathy and tenderness?

"Vicki a little nervous, a little sad. I see in her eyes. I understand her. I feel sorry for all of them. He turn out to be good, your father. Not like people today. He was very good, not just to me. He was very good to my mother. How could I not be good to him? His children, till today, they love me. Wherever I am, Jack call, he write—I am happy for a week. I cry when I think that Jack died....

"And when I say to Chai, 'How can you look at me, I'm so hairy!' he say, 'I love every hair on your body!'"

Vicki often said that when Abba first escorted his young fiancée into their home in Jerusalem, he lined all five children up inside the front door and gestured with extravagance.

"Sivia," he announced, "these are your slaves!"

This story always offended my mother. She would jump to my father's defense. "It is not true," she would insist. "He *never* say that."

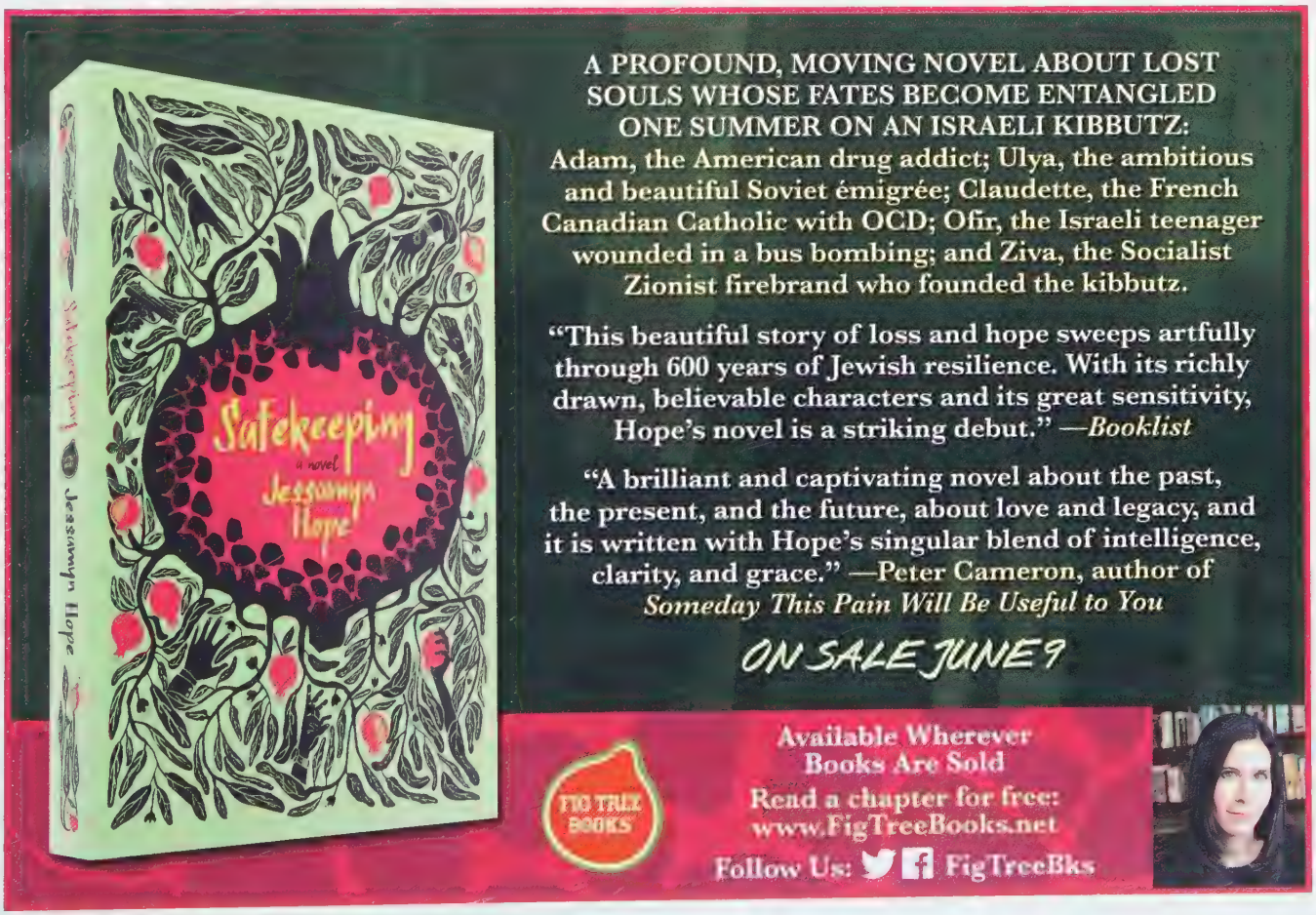
My mother still lies on her bed. The rectangle of afternoon sun has crept slowly up her legs to her stomach and chest. She has been swept out to sea with her story, but now she is back. She is done.

I wish I had known the young Sivia.

I ask again, "Eema, did you love him?"

"I learn to love him," she says. ■

Ruth Mason, a journalist in Jerusalem, is a grant writer with Shatil, the action arm of the New Israel Fund. "Bride Price" is adapted from a longer work-in-progress. Mason blogs at http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/author/ruth-mason.


A PROFOUND, MOVING NOVEL ABOUT LOST SOULS WHOSE FATES BECOME ENTANGLED ONE SUMMER ON AN ISRAELI KIBBUTZ:
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Facts on the Ground

a short story by
RUCHAMA KING FEUERMAN

Einat gazes at her younger sister fiddling with the CD player, trying to find the right song to match the mood of the day. As if the right background music while your house is getting destroyed will make all the difference!

She stares out the window, past the greenhouses bare and stripped so that you can't even tell bug-free lettuce ever grew there, but no, she won't think about that. Her eyes fall on the boy soldiers and girl soldiers dressed in black, like they're bit players in some horror movie. If she squints her eyes, they look like black teeth. Or maybe, if she tilts her head, like a weird moving black wall. Hard to believe many of these soldiers are eighteen, like herself.

Her father over in the study is bent over a Talmud. She's used to seeing him with a spade or pruning shears or dealing with shipments of plastic bags. He rarely studies Torah and isn't much of a scholar, although he's the best chazzan in all of Nevei Deklaim. And Ima, the brains of the family, is saying psalms, not writing one of her usual sharp letters to the editor of Ha'aretz that never get printed. So today everything is upside down.

"I hate them," she hears her sister Meirav say, her face pressed against the window. "Trying to scare us like that with their black uniforms. Pathetic."

Einat lets out a short laugh. As if their uniforms are the worst of their crimes. Anyway, she won't waste her fury on the soldiers. And she doesn't think the uniforms are pathetic but a brilliant move. The familiar khaki-colored army uniforms are gone. The Soldier, the *chayal*—the one who normally is someone's own son, brother or sister—has now been replaced, turned into the Other.

She feels like an Other herself. Her bags are packed, unlike everyone else in her family. That one act separates her from them. There is no way she's going to leave her clothes, photo albums, books and jewelry behind to be destroyed by the claw machine! Is her family nuts? No, the whole community is! Even if she understands why.

The Prime Minister had given them a choice. Those who leave Nevei Dekalim beforehand will be compensated with jobs to make up for their destroyed livelihoods. With a place to live, and extra cash. Sure. Only idiots believe that. And those who wait for the last day will have everything they own destroyed by the bulldozers and the claw. But at least, the people tell themselves, they will have their self-respect and the company of their friends and neighbors. For months, that's all the neighbors talk about as they eye which family is packing, going, and which family is staying.

For the first time in Einat's 18 years, she sees she can't rely on them. It's like her parents jumped off a high diving board and only halfway down checked if there was water in the pool.

What a way to live, Einat thinks. She wants to shake them. What's wrong with everybody? Children rely on parents to show them the way, and all these years she let herself be guided by her parents. Wise, good, hard-working people, everyone says, and it's true. Her father came up with the smartest idea about how to market the bug-free lettuce overseas. And when Einat was suffering from a strange rash that no doctor could cure, it was Ima who spent hours Googling every night till she found the right treatment. But for the first time in Einat's eighteen years, she sees she can't rely on them. It's like her parents jumped off a high diving board and only halfway down checked if there was water in the pool. Do they have to be so honorable and stay till the bitter end?

So her bags are packed. At least she should salvage something from this whole mess. She has even secretly packed a luggage with Ima's bread machine and wedding albums, the nebulizer for her brother's asthma (they use it maybe once a year, but still…) and some of the better pieces of jewelry. If Ima knew, she might get angry, but later, Einat knows she'll thank her. Not now, but later, after the claw comes and everything is demolished. Her mother's precious computer, too.

"*You will see, you will see, how much good there will be, next year…*" Her sister listens to a few bars and then switches to another song.

Ach. Meirav and her fantasies. She has always been that way, writing her little poems about the flowers of Israel and soldiers who find God in a rainbow. Actually, some of the poems aren't bad. But today, Einat has no patience for dreamers or poets.

Through the open window, she can see the star-shaped synagogue–so cool, so retro. Her friends gather there in their garish orange T-shirts with slogans like "Disengagement is Suicide," and "Never Again to Deportation." They are praying like it's Yom Kippur or something. Calling out in that open-souled way. Part of her longs to join them. But no—she shakes her head—it feels too phony. She isn't an idealist like them. Her faith is tainted by practicality.

The black wall of soldiers has moved closer. Is that smoke she sees in the distance? She hears muffled sounds coming from the study. It's her father moaning—or worse, crying? She can't stand to be close to her parents right now, to hear Ima's rants, see her finger jabbing into the air like a bullet as she makes her points—as if anyone cares—and Abba all uncomposed, his beard disheveled, the tabs of his collar twisted this way and that. Like a kid, she thinks in disgust. A kid!

The anger she has been sitting on for all these months rises up in her throat like indigested lumps of food. Her fool-

"I DO NOT SEE THE SKY," ESTHER NAOR, 2013.

ish, misguided, naïve family with their foolish ideologies, more precious to them than…than, she doesn't know what. She grew up on this ideology—it was their religious duty to create little villages, settlements, in the midst of Arab enclaves, and in this way ensure a Jewish presence that could not easily be dislodged—no matter what peace deal the Israeli government might broker.

"Facts on the ground!" Rabbi Even-Cheyn declared from the pulpit, Shabbat after Shabbat. "A Jewish town is a physical fact, a reality that cannot be changed! Only in this way, building communities in the midst of the Arabs, can we reclaim our ancient land!" Not only that, the rabbi explained, but this land in the middle of Gaza is a strategic asset to Israel, and holding onto it is a way to protect Sderot, Ashkelon and many parts of Israel from Arab rocket fire. "You are the front line soldiers in this battle!" he thundered, backed up by plentiful Torah sources, a flowing beard and burning brown eyes that made him look like a prophet of Israel. And when she listened, she felt pride and imbued with purpose, like Atlas, holding up the world.

The other day Einat went to the hothouses where Abba and Ima had built up their bug-free lettuce business. The place was totally dismantled. Empty. Thirty years' work gone down the tubes. Hundreds of livelihoods swallowed up, just like that. She kept circling the place, searching for something, a memento maybe. Finally, who should she bump into but Rabbi Even-Cheyn. He walked over, to try to give inspiration; she could tell because he had that shiny, idealistic look in his eyes. She tried to turn away but he called out, "Einat, chazak v'amatz! Be strong—for all the Jewish nation."

She stared at him. What are you talking about? She wanted to yell: You let us down. You fed us slogans. Facts on the ground, facts on the ground. That's all I ever heard from you. You said a Jewish government would never kick out Jews from their own homes. Never. You promised! All she muttered now was, "Chazak v'amatz," and got out of there fast.

Well, today, the Never is happening.

You said a Jewish government would never kick out Jews from their own homes. Never. You promised!

Einat peers out the window at a boy who is two years older than she is, crawling on the road, clawing at the dust, moaning like a woman in labor. She knows that boy. Doron. In fact, one summer she had a crush on him. But look at him now, like an animal. How's that for a fact on the ground? She snorts softly.

Meirav takes out her tiny book of psalms and begins to pray, her lips moving tautly, quickly. Einat can hear Ima in the study shouting into the phone, "My computer's not working. You don't understand, I have to send this email to the Prime Minister!" The intensity in her mother's voice makes Einat cringe. How will Ima leave the house when the soldiers come for her—with dignity, or screaming, refusing to budge, each one holding a limb? When she closes her eyes and sees that image her palms prickle with dread. Einat's Torah teacher, Gveret Shemer, says a religious woman should never draw attention to herself. Gveret Shemer who travels in from Bnei Brak to teach is the picture of self-containment and refinement in her short, black, side-parted *sheitel*.

Abba suddenly barges from the room, his big knitted yarmulke sloping to one side. "I'll be back," he calls to the girls. Einat sees him stride toward the soldiers, his speckled beard fluttering. What's he going to say to those soldiers that will change their minds? Her parents are dreamers. Dreamers! And now Ima has leapt up and is joining Abba outside.

Einat turns away—she can't bear to watch them make jokes of themselves—and goes to the kitchen. She pours herself some orange juice, their last carton. She sees the sandwich maker next to the toaster. Meirav begged Ima to buy it, but they rarely use it. No loss there. Her eyes drift toward the silhouette she drew of her father years ago, a pretty good likeness, considering she has no artistic ability. It always touched her that

"MY WORRY BEADS 2," ESTHER NAOR, 2014.

her parents hung it up for all these years. If it had been her child, it wouldn't have lasted more than a week. Clutter. But now the thought that her silly artwork will be destroyed by the claw makes her stomach bend in two.

She stares at the clock that makes funny bird sounds on the hour, at the terra cotta-colored backsplash that Abba set behind the sink with his own hands, doing the caulking and all. She can already picture the claw coming, can hear the horrible growling sound of stone giving way, the slow caving in of walls, dishes flying, the oven turning to metal pulp, the leather easy chair collapsing like mud, bricks flinging everywhere. The whole world is collapsing. She feels a tightness in her chest. It's hard to breathe, as if the claw has already done its work, filled her home with ash and smoke. Can a house disappear just like that? She lets out a groan. "All gone," she mumbles.

Meirav lifts her head from her psalms. "Stop it!" she implores, her wispy hair falling into her eyes. "Rabbi Even-Cheyn says a person should have faith even as he feels the sword on his neck."

Einat says nothing, just shakes her head. Who can she even talk to? Nobody's left. How come she's the only smart one? If she'd been the head of this whole Gush Katif movement, she would've focused on different things, instead of land, land, land. She would've tried to get the public on their side. Change people's minds and hearts. A movie could've done that with some famous actor. But whenever she suggested that, people just laughed at her.

Well, they won't laugh much when she decides to leave, Einat thinks. And then she straightens and rubs her eyes. Leave? But where will she go to? She and her friends are all signed up for National Service. She'd been hoping to get assigned to a school in some poor development town up North. But suddenly the idea of being together with all her friends who think just like her—or the way she used to, *Eretz Yisrael Shleima*—the Greater Israel and all that—makes her gag. Forget it. No way will she join them. Her bags are packed. She doesn't know where those bags will take her, though.

Meirav is now fiddling with the radio and lands on a Kotel classic. "...There are men with hearts of stone," it plays, "... there are stones with hearts of men."

"You know what?" Einat flings out, "I'm going to Bnos Devorah seminary in the fall."

Meirav squints at her. "What are you talking about? Where's that?"

"It's in Bnai Brak," she clarifies. Where Gveret Shemer, her Torah teacher, lives.

Meirav's eyes go round with shock. "You're kidding, right? A black hat place? For hareidim?"

Yeah, she was kidding, but now suddenly it doesn't seem so crazy. She has seen the children who live over in Bnai Brak, boys with their swinging side curls, children who aren't complicated by the outside world, by politics, by foreign music. She has seen the girls her age who dress with a modesty of a different era, girls who strike her as complete. Einat shakes her head. "Our whole life, it's over." Her hand cuts sideways through the air, chopping all their slogans and ideology in half, and another chop—into quarters. "Obsolete," she says harshly.

"Hah, hah, sure," Meirav scoffs. "You'd last a week with the dossim. No, a day."

Einat shrugs. Her sister still thinks the world begins and ends with Gush Katif.

"Or who knows," Einat continues, playing with the curtain, something Ima always forbade because it gets smudged so easily, but now, who cares? "Maybe I'll go to journalism school." But of course there won't be money for such things. Or for anything. Overnight they'll be beggars.

Meirav merely flicks off the radio, no longer paying attention. "Ach, this song is too sad!" She saunters off into her bedroom.

Is that a sound of a luggage getting dragged out of her sister's closet, Einat wonders, just as she hears a woman's high-pitched scream from outside. The scream rises above all the noise and tumult. It is pitched so high, so powerfully loud, the entire village must hear its raw anguish. Einat swallows. A split second later she recognizes the voice.

Ima. Einat's hands and throat go cold. It's Ima, for sure. The shock of her mother's cry propels her toward the front door. Ima! I'm coming—the thought shoots through her brain as she flings open the screen door and runs outside. She cranes her neck, looks past the old petting zoo evacuated three weeks ago, looks here, there, beyond the claw machine waiting to begin its horrible work. She blinks and sees teenage boys crouching on a roof with buckets of red paint—as if they could stand up against an entire army!—she sees smoke rising from one of the houses, she sees crowds of people streaming past, the ones in orange, and always, always, the soldiers in black, but where is Ima, where oh where is her Ima? Her breathing comes in fits and starts. She runs toward the claw, and right there beyond the empty greenhouses she spots—yes!—her mother's straw hat and her blue peasant skirt. A crowd of girl soldiers surround her. One holds out a bottle of water toward her mother. Ima's hat is askew, her face blotchy and distorted with fury, her head is bobbing up and down, her arms are moving like a windmill, and she looks like....like a clown!

Ima is screaming at the top of her lungs: "You stole our cucumbers, our parsley, our dill! You cut off our feet." She shakes both arms wildly.

Einat covers her mouth. Is that Ima, truly? Her mouth goes dry as smoke. A shudder starts in her shoulders and travels down her arms and palms. So silly, so sad. Ridiculous, roars through her. She ducks behind a mailbox, crouches there, hidden—and then—hurry, fast, before anyone sees—she turns back, runs the other way, fast, faster, her shoes scuffing against each other in her speed to get away from that horrible spectacle. Silly and sad, silly and sad. The words repeat like the banging of a shovel against her head. Her chest is hurting so much, each breath pokes her like glass. She keeps running, but her lungs are closing and it's so so hard to breathe, until finally the earth rises and she trips and falls to the ground near a palm tree, and there she rubs her knees and whimpers, Ima. ■

Ruchama King Feuerman is the author of the novels In the Courtyard of the Kabbalist *and* Seven Blessings.

HIDDEN CHILD

When Caritas Saved a Jewish Girl

by GRETA HERENSZTAT, *alias* GINETTE HENRY

We were leaving again. Fleeing. This time from Megève, a pretty little town in the Alps, near the Swiss border. We took some buses and trains, my mother deciding finally to head for the south of France, which was not yet occupied by the Germans. She decided on the city of Nice. In a big city, she said, a woman and a small child would be less noticed.

Nice was occupied by the Italians. "They do not chase or arrest Jews," my mother often said. It was a mild occupation, without roundups. The Italian soldiers stood by in groups, watching people with a benevolent eye, smiling at pretty girls and children.

We walked and walked until suddenly my mother stopped at a small sign in a window. I read it for her: "Small room for rent, clean and cheap." She rang the bell on the side of a massive wooden door and an old lady let us in. The rental room had another door that opened onto a side street: we could come and go without being seen. My mother paid for three months in advance.

Since she had a thick Yiddish accent, I spoke for my mother at all times. She pretended she had a throat problem. That's how we survived: a woman without a voice, and a small girl. My mother was determined to survive.

I had seen the men take away my father. I had seen my brother walk away and not return. Why did they all disappear, with the rest of our family? I could not ask my mother because she always said, "I am here. Do not worry. We will survive."

What did "survive" mean? There were so many new words I didn't understand, but I kept silent.

One day, I came across a headline that I read to my mother: the Italians are leaving and the Nazis are on their way. My mother became agitated. She grabbed her bag and searched through it feverishly, tossing the contents on the table. She found a small piece of paper, told me to dress quickly, and then dragged me outside without waiting for me to finish dressing. She was like a woman possessed. I kept quiet and held her hand.

She gave me the paper and told me she didn't know how to find the address. We walked and walked. Then I saw the street we were looking for. My mother stopped in front of a building and pushed me against the door in front of her, as if to hide me. The door opened a crack.

My mother said in her Yiddish accent and in a low voice, "We are here to talk to the people in the OSE [*Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants*]." A young woman quickly pulled us inside. She and my mother spoke softly.

Why was my mother crying?

"We are going to see a priest," she said. "Do not talk unless asked a question. It would be better not to talk at all. We are in grave danger. The priest will help us."

"Why do we need help?"

She didn't answer.

What was a "priest"?

We were back on the street, the young woman pointing at another door. My mother knocked.

"Greta," she told me. "We have to separate. You will go into hiding in a convent."

What was a "convent"?

"When the war is over, I will come and get you. We will forget all of this."

I was stunned. Had I done something terrible? Was I such a bad girl that she wanted to get rid of me? She avoided looking at me. She did not speak to me again.

The door opened, but I did not understand that my mother was leaving me here, in a strange red room with a man in a long robe. I turned to ask her to explain, but she was gone.

The priest looked at me.

"You are now Ginette Henry," he said. "You were born in Orange and your parents are dead. Do you understand? You cannot tell your real name to anyone. You cannot tell where you were born and you cannot talk about your parents. Now repeat your new name and your birthplace."

A friend and me in 1939. I'm six.

I was speechless.

"Talk to me," he said. "I have to be sure you understand the gravity of the situation. Repeat, please."

Finally, with a trembling voice, I said the unthinkable: "My name is Ginette Henry. I was born in Orange and my parents are dead. I am going to stay with my godparents."

What was a "godparent"?

"If you do this, you might survive."

I still did not know the word "survive."

Suddenly, I was nine years old and an orphan.

I was put with a farm family, working from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the fields, picking flowers. My body would not straighten up; I could barely walk. One day, a neighbor came by to cut the hair of the farm workers' children. I was blue-eyed, fair-skinned, and blonde, while the other children were mostly dark and swarthy. The neighbor made some comments.

When she left, the farmer's wife said to her husband, in a strained voice, "I told you: this is too dangerous."

In the middle of that night, she shook me awake and told me to get dressed. I obeyed, mute with fear. She pointed silently to the door. I opened it. Someone came out of a car and pulled me inside.

I never said goodbye to the farmer or his wife.

A black iron gate opened, leading to a front door. I was pushed through—a parcel that someone wanted to get rid of.

I saw a very young woman dressed in a floor-length black robe, a white collar framing her face, brown piercing eyes, a pink complexion, and a generous mouth. Her hands were folded over a cross hanging from her neck. A radiant smile illuminated her face, her white teeth gleaming. Her fingers left the cross to stroke my face and brush the hair away from my forehead. She came closer and hugged me.

I had not been touched by a kind person for so long that I had forgotten how it felt. I was swept up in a maelstrom of emotions.

"Do you want some food?" she whispered.

Food had been scarce on my long journey. I was so famished that I almost choked on the bread.

"This is your room."

She kissed me, made a sign over my head, and left.

A moon ray shone through the window. Above the bed, I saw a cross with a man nailed to it.

What was the meaning of it? Who was this man?

The bed felt hard, and I was afraid to sleep. In the morning, I didn't know where I was, but the nailed man was still on the wall.

"*Bonjour*!" It was the same young woman. "Wash your face and we will say prayers."

What were "prayers"?

She squeezed my hand. "My name is Sister Andrea and I am a nun. You have to do exactly as I tell you."

"Yes," I replied. What was a "nun"?

We walked into the morning sunshine and approached a small house adjacent to the cloister with a white wall and a red brick roof. The house had a bright red door surrounded by sculpted columns, each with a stone sculpture of a face.

"Saints," said Sister Andrea, pointing.

What was a "saint"?

I followed her inside. I was spellbound by the white interior and overwhelmed by the silence. There were white stone walls, black benches, and an altar with a gigantic cross hanging on the back wall between stained-glass windows. Mediterranean light streamed. Flowers had been placed everywhere.

The heavy door closed behind us and I was suddenly convulsed by uncontrollable shaking. The cross, the man nailed to it, the chapel, all these women—"nuns" they called themselves.

Where was I? Who were these women wearing long dresses? What would happen to me now? Would I never see my family again? I starting weeping.

Sister Andrea saw my anguish. She understood.

"Don't worry. I will explain everything after prayers," she whispered. "Meanwhile, sit on that bench and be silent."

I folded my arms tightly around my body for comfort, and tried to understand what I was looking at. Further down the wall, I saw a closed black iron grille with other "nuns" behind it. Later, I learned that they were cloistered. They never left the convent, and no one could approach them or talk to them.

I had not been touched by a kind person for so long that I had forgotten how it felt.

Suddenly, I heard singing. It came from the nuns behind the grille, their hands clasped across their chests, eyes closed in ecstasy. Beautiful sounds, unlike anything I had ever heard before. Profoundly moving.

I sat in a trance. Sister Andrea sat next to me, her hand on my shoulder.

I thought I might be safe here.

After the music stopped, I said all at once, in a very low voice, "Who is the man on the wall? Why are the 'nuns' behind the grilles? Why are you all wearing long dresses and naked feet? What are 'prayers'?"

She shushed me, as a "mass" was in progress, another word I did not understand.

When it was over, I left with Sister Andrea. She explained everything: the brown-robed monk, the contemplation of heaven, and the Clarisses' vow to live in poverty, never speak, and never have any contact with the outside world.

Sister Andrea and a handful of sisters, however, had taken different vows, she explained. They were allowed to leave the premises for errands and they could talk. They brought food to the 40 cloistered nuns and left it on their doorstep, and they also cooked for the 10 orphans and the three or four children in hiding.

What helped me was my Aryan appearance. And, of course, I was very obedient. Sister Andrea had a little sister whom she loved very much, she told me. A tiny girl with blond hair and a sunny disposition; she had not seen her since she entered the convent. Sister Andrea became very attached to me. She had told me I could stay by her side all the time, *always*. The other sisters were relieved to have her take complete charge of one of the hidden children. They were all aware of the dangers, yet they participated in the risk wholeheartedly.

I loved the grounds inside the walls of the convent: the pretty flowers, the trees, and especially a palm tree which became my friend. I sat at its feet a lot, my back against its rugged skin. I talked to it. I told it stories about the family I once had. I secretly whispered my real name, my brother's and my parents' names. I felt better after our conversations. Even on rainy days, I sat there, the raindrops hanging from the branches resembling tears on eyelashes.

I was Sister Andrea's little shadow. I was not friendly with the other children. I was afraid someone would start talking and I would reveal something. My favorite time was going daily with Sister Andrea to pick flowers "for the glory of God." We placed the flowers inside the chapel. I could have stayed there the whole day just looking at them.

I learned my catechism and that Jesus Christ was the son of God who had died for our sins. I learned all the prayers by rote.

MORE
Online: "Notes from the Underground: A Gathering of Children Hidden During the Holocaust"

Clockwise from top left: My father and his seven siblings, all murdered in Poland. My father, Judka Herensztat, killed in Auschwitz. My brother Berek, a guerrilla partisan and then an Eclaireur with the American Army. My mother (on right) and her siblings; all survived the war in France. This little boy, hiding with me in Antibes in 1944, was discovered by the Nazis.

I was always hungry. We ate dry bread and a bowl of watered-down coffee mixed with milk. I ate the bread slowly in a vast room with a high ceiling and large windows through which the sun streamed. On the wall was the man. I didn't wear my yellow star. In effect, I wasn't a Jew anymore; I was a practicing Catholic.

What I recall most is the constant pealing of the bells, calling the sisters to different prayers. There were nine daily prayers, two extra prayers on Friday, and on Thursdays prayer until midnight. There were eight prayers on Saturday and seven on Sunday.

It was a strict schedule and it provided a sense of peace. I appreciated the regularity of every day. Sister Andrea was my mother, my father, and my brother. She asked me to pray, but she never pressured me. The sisters rustled through the corridors, sailing in their dark robes like boats on the sea. I loved the bells marking day and night. The routine was a lifeline after years of running and hiding. The pageantry enthralled me.

Young women, probably not older than 18, took their vows, their parents invited to witness their marriage to God. The altar would be so white with flowers that it was almost blinding. The 'bride' would walk in with two sisters on a special red carpet; sometimes there was coercion if she hesitated. The veil was taken off and her beautiful hair was cut, her locks falling on the floor. Then she would lay on the marble floor, arms spread out like butterflies on a piece of cardboard, unable to fly away. The family would cry softly. This would be the last time they would see her.

I wanted so badly to be that undefiled girl prostrated on the floor, giving my young life away to the man on the cross. I liked that the bride became anonymous, leaving the chapel, surrounded by the two sisters and a new identity.

This is what I wanted. And I wanted the prayer book that the novice got, with its soft leather cover, a red silk string holding the pages and the gleaming gold seal on three sides.

All day, I followed Sister Andrea. I didn't care if I understood what we did. I especially loved it when the Clarisses, kneeling behind the iron black grille, started to sing. I never saw them except then. With their heads and faces hidden under their wimples, their hands folded inside their habits' long sleeves, I didn't really see them. They were like ghosts, motionless, transfixed, then filing out in long processions. They never left the cloister except when they died and had to be buried in a cemetery.

The nuns' voices penetrated deep inside me, like a soft hand caressing. Sister Andrea watched me with a smile. I was not permitted to take communion, so I watched the nuns swallow the white wafer with envy.

I was 10 now. I would watch Sister Andrea in her habit, her hands folded perfectly, merged with her prayers. She had no self; she was all spirit.

I knew that deep down Sister Andrea hoped I would become like her. That if no one claimed me, I would stay, be baptized, take my vows. Still, I was conflicted: on the one hand, I wanted to return to my family; on the other, I was so loved here. I was in the convent and I was happy.

When the Nazis came in their marching boots, I pressed myself against the wall, not moving, not looking at Sister Andrea. She touched me gently

on the shoulder, but I pulled back. I knew instinctively that my life in the convent was over.

No one wanted me. I must be a bad girl, I thought again, if no one wanted me.

Sister Andrea prepared my bag. I really had almost nothing but the clothes on my back. The one thing I had become attached to were the white rosary beads with the cross that Sister Andrea had given me when I first arrived at the convent.

"We have to wait for nightfall," she said. "Someone will come take you. Remember your new name, where you were born, and that your parents are dead."

But I really did not know who I was anymore. I had already forgotten how to speak Yiddish, which I had spoken fluently at home with my family.

Sister Andrea tried to talk with me, but I did not respond. I was angry. I felt betrayed. She had lied to me.

But as a hooded figure grabbed me and guided me towards a black car, I turned my head and said softly, "Sister Andrea, I will be back."

I wanted so badly to be that undefiled girl prostrated on the floor, giving my young life away to the man on the cross.

There were more hiding places, but eventually, at a train station, a woman in charge stood on a box. She told all the children—we had been packed in the train cars like sardines—to be quiet. She started calling out names, and with each name a parent moved up in front, and a child moved forward, too. Like a ballet that was silent.

The woman calling names reached the last sheet of paper. I had not heard my name. My throat constricted.

I only knew one name: Ginette Henry. I had forgotten Greta Herensztat. They called again and again: Greta Herensztat. Greta Herensztat. Suddenly a young man with jet black hair came flying through the crowd, shouting the name over and over.

He lifted me in the air. "Greta, remember? I am your brother Bernard. Look here, girl, this is your mother."

I looked back at the platform still crowded with unclaimed children.

What would happen to them?

Looking at my brother and mother, I slowly realized that, yes, I was not alone

Clockwise from top left: Me at 16. My mother. The Convent of the Clarisses. Back at the convent: Sister Marie Antoine (with the book) remembered me! My daughter Claudine-Judith, my granddaughter Hannah-Charlotte, and me After the war, my mother and I opened this store

in the world: I belonged to someone. And I was someone.

My name was Greta Herensztat.

In 2003, I went back to visit the convent with my daughter and granddaughter, keeping the promise I had made to Sister Andrea in 1945. While we sat for a bite to eat in the vast, familiar dining room, the door opened and a very small nun flew into the room with her hands in the air, asking, "And where is our little Ginette? Ginette Henry?"

I did not remember her. I was barely 11 when I left the convent, and she must have been 16 or 17. Like a bird, she flew in my direction. I stood up and she took hold of my hands, and, standing on the tips of her toes, pulled me down to her level and gave me many kisses.

"Stay where you are," she told us. "I must go bring the Mother Superior and the other sisters."

Suddenly there was a flurry of long robes and veils, and the Mother Superior came in with all the nuns, twittering like birds. I remembered that sometimes, as a child, I would ask a nun why she saved Jewish children, risking her life every day, and she would answer, "Saving a Jewish child is like saving the child Jesus."

Sister Marie Antoine told me that Sister Andrea had died very young. She said Sister Andrea had always talked about me. She was sure that I would return one day because I had made a promise. A promise to return to the only place where I had known happiness in the midst of a war so violent, a war against children.

Sister Marie Antoine introduced my granddaughter, Hannah-Charlotte, to all the other nuns.

"Look," she said, "she is a miracle." ■

Greta Herensztat was born in Paris in 1933 to a Jewish family that had escaped pogroms in Poland. In 1960, she emigrated to the United States with her husband and daughter. A poet and essayist, she was the principal of the Lycée Francais in New York City, and she taught Latin and French at several private schools. Her memoir, Rabbits in the Fields of Strangers, *is available at judjulgin@yahoo.com.*

Does writing heal?

PUBLISHING YOUR HOLOCAUST MEMOIR AT 82

It took me many years to write my memoir—the material was lying there like a stone. I considered it private. I never talked about my wartime experiences. But then my daughter, who came with my husband and me from France to New York when she was 7, told me she was French and nothing else. That's how it started. She wanted to take classes with the priest who came to her school every week.

"No," I said. "You are a Jew."

This opened the floodgates. It was time for me to talk, to tell her my story, to show my very few photographs. I started slowly. She was young. She asked questions. I answered. And religion was something I didn't want to touch! In the media, she started looking for things. On TV, I would sit down with her and show it to her.

She had nightmares. But then she asked to go to a Jewish camp, and she came back totally changed. She was a fervent Jewish person. She keeps Shabbat. I'm double-minded about this, but I did create somebody else with my story. And now my daughter is transmitting Judaism to her grandchildren, Josef and Ella-Charlotte.

Then, 20, 30 years ago, I took a class on writing memoir at Queensborough Community College, and the teacher said, "You should write down your story."

It's very strange to see your own book, to see it written down. And I'm 82. It took me 10 years, weekends, nights. I worked at The Writers Room on 8th Street in Manhattan. You read your book and you say, "Uh-huh. This whole thing happened. Now I have it in writing." But I look at the little girl on the cover and I say, "Nope, that's not me anymore."

My husband was also a hidden child in France. He was placed on a farm, he ran after the chickens, the Nazis didn't come. He got lucky. These were the best years of his life. Eventually, we immigrated to New York, but we got very bad backaches trying to pick up that gold on the streets.

I always was talking to my daughter, and then to my granddaughter, about the way the convent looked: how it was on top of a mountain, you could see all around it, how the chapel looked, the front gate that they closed at night. I wanted to go back forever. In my mind, it was always, "I'll go back." I mean, if my parents weren't alive after the war, I planned to go back for good. But then I put it on the back burner. In the United States, finally, I said, "I should go back." I took my daughter and granddaughter on a trip and we went to Nice.

When we went to sleep in the convent that night—with Jesus hanging on the wall—my granddaughter had a fit. "I can't sleep with this."

"All right," I said. I took him off the wall.

That year she went on March for the Living and then my daughter joined her in Israel.

Writing my book? It didn't change anything, sometimes it feels better. When you lose your childhood, it's a hole. Your feelings don't change, but you learn to make peace with your feelings, to *live* with your feelings, with what stays there, embedded like a stone.

by Greta Herensztat, as told to Susan Schnur

CONFRONTING GENERATIONAL TENSIONS TO BUILD OUR BADASS JEWISH FEMINIST FUTURE

by ERICA BRODY

Watching "Mary Poppins" with my four-year-old daughter one Sunday, I realized how the most remembered songs from that titan of childhood cinema have less to do with women's rights and more to do with spoonfuls of sugar. And yet the children's mother, Winifred Banks, sings what may be the world's most-watched tribute to women's suffrage. Maybe even to feminism.

Shoulder to shoulder into the fray!
Our daughters' daughters will adore us
And they'll sing in grateful chorus,
"Well done, Sister Suffragette!"

For me, these lyrics hold a hope that feels timeless: We'll win these fights for women; together won and done.

Isn't this what each generation strives for? That by the time we're old enough to be grandparents, there will be tributes to our triumphs? That as kids grow up they'll celebrate the past as they take on the responsibility each of us carries to change the future—or, in Jew-speak, to heal the world, pursue justice?

Last year, I was invited to an Upper West Side seder in New York with several Jewish women who had, literally, stood shoulder to shoulder four decades ago and marched into the American fray for women's rights, creating a distinctly American, Jewish, feminist space. Included in an effort to share this experience and space with younger women, I was humming a tune of gratitude—"Well done, Sister Second Wave!"—when I kicked off my boots and lined them up next to my heroines' in the hallway.

It's strange being a Generation Xer (ages 35–50 in 2015, if you go by Pew Research Center metrics), no longer the young guard, not yet the old guard, a small generation bookended by two mega ones: Baby Boomers and Millennials. I'd claimed the mantle of feminism as a 14-year-old purple-haired activist spewing Emma Goldman quotes, but it was only in my late 20s that I started thinking of myself as part of a long line of *Jewish* feminists, proud of their achievements, steeped in the criticisms, turning tides.

Ever since, from my perch—mainly behind a screen, as a writer, editor and strategist—I'd done my best to lift up progressive Jewish women's voices, to build bridges. Yet for a long time, to be honest, I'd blocked out the white noise of tensions between generations of Jewish feminists. I tried extra hard when I was peppered with questions from some older feminists along the lines of *Why aren't you....? No one your age seems to care about....!* It's tricky, especially when you admire someone who seems blind to the fact that there might be a good reason why you've ended up with a seat at the table. Hello, are you there, disconnect? It's me, Erica. It's tricky, too, to take the lessons learned from those experiences to heart. I'd bet I'm not the only Xer whose learning curve has seen some bumps that have helped us grow into better, more aware, more collaborative older allies. You know, the kind who make fewer assumptions and listen more.

So there I was, honored to be invited into this space alongside the very women whose once-subversive ideas and actions transformed the landscape of feminism, and Jewish feminism. Just cushions away from Bella Abzug's hat, in a room where it was clear, from the range of ages, that younger voices would be valued. Truth be told, I was moved by moments we shared, including when I realized I couldn't name my maternal great-grandmother.

At the point in the evening set aside for speaking our challenges, the older Jewish feminists began. But when the younger

women started talking, one of the older women sounded off with despair: Why aren't young women protesting more publicly? How can you let reproductive rights disintegrate? *Why do….?* Presto, the same disappointment from Second Wave feminists about why younger women don't do more, and the same frustration from younger women feeling criticized, or not being given space to set their own agenda.

As one 40-something complained to me, time and again she's seen "established feminists excited by young voices" invite this perspective, but "then the voices would be sidelined."

This room was one where younger women had explicitly been invited in—to be heard and not just seen—so the challenges to our activism stung.

I ended up jumping in as an Xer, pointing out how we were talking about three generations, not two, and how each contains multitudes. The era in which we grow up determines how we grow up; understanding that, it's much easier to act productively.

To probe some of these realities, I later reached out to Jewish feminists I know or have worked with, and others I've admired from afar. Twenty-two—ranging in age from 18 to 76—agreed to take time out of their work-life-family-feminist juggles to check in with me about tensions between Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial feminists.

INTO THE FRAY, TODAY:
GO FORTH & FEMINIST (MY WAY)

It's as if the Baby Boomers said, Go forth, be fruitful and multiply. And now, in just about every nook of American life, there are signs of feminism.

While older feminists ask, "Why aren't you doing feminism our way?" younger women talk about being "harangued"—often not for their own actions, but for the fact that Gen X seems to have fewer self-identified feminists, plus feminist protests are less visible than recent ones about climate change and Black Lives Matter. For my Generation X, and for Millennials, raised with many of the wins of feminism in place—Family Medical Leave Act, *Roe*, working moms struggling to find balance—there's an acceptance that there are as many different ways to be a feminist as we can imagine, and almost as many ways to pursue feminist goals.

Not everyone is going to hit the streets. That's fine. Code! Invent! Invest! Subvert! Create! For many, feminism finds expression not through campaigns labeled explicitly feminist but by infusing all aspects of everyday life with feminism.

Priorities are often shaped by where we're at in our own lives: often younger feminists talk about slut-shaming, dress codes and campus rape, while 30- and 40-somethings are more likely to focus on family-friendly policies (that don't lead to workplace discrimination) and economic justice for *all* women. "There are issues that are easy *not* to see when you're 21, like how society deals with how women are advancing in the workplace. A lot of that happens when you're older," says Rabbi Jill Jacobs, 39, Executive Director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights. "When I was in college, I had the sense that everyone was equal. Then, in my 30s, I started seeing how sexism plays out in more covert ways."

Elissa Strauss, 35, a writer, recently sat on a panel as part of a 25th-anniversary celebration of Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 76, asked her why young women today aren't taking to the streets. Strauss notes, "I do think too much talking, not enough walking, is a legitimate concern about the women's movement today. But I don't think it's fair to place a hierarchy on what women are doing to elicit change. We need political change, yes, but we also need what Second Wavers called consciousness-raising; it is still most definitely worth our while."

The second wave focused on "transforming institutions," says Pogrebin, a founding editor of Ms. magazine, and the author of 11 books, including feminist classics like *Getting Yours: How to Make the System Work for the Working Woman* (1975), and the novel *Single Jewish Male Seeking Soul Mate* (2015) [See p. 12]. "My sense of the younger wave is of an individualistic militancy. It doesn't feel as if solidarity is as much of a motivational tool, that sisterhood is powerful," she adds. "We were interested in litigation and legislation as well as consciousness and mind-changing and altering social relations."

Both generations often worry about younger women who distance themselves from the word "feminist." Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, 40, co-chair of ALEPH, the umbrella organization for the Jewish Renewal movement, says she feels generational tension when younger women "don't see the value in the label or the identity."

This happens in religious settings, too, like "Jewish day schools that have encountered considerable resistance from their bat-mitzvah-aged female students when they are encouraged or sometimes even required to wear *tefillin* during morning services," says Raysh Weiss, 31, a Wexner Graduate Fellow and rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a co-creator of the YouTube video "If Men Rabbis Were Spoken To the Way Women Rabbis Are Spoken To." "I wonder if

"My sense of the younger wave is of an individualistic militancy. It doesn't feel that solidarity is much of a motivational tool, or that sisterhood is powerful."

these students simply take for granted the measures which earlier generations of Jewish feminists fought so hard to implement."

Political columnist and author Sarah Darer Littman, 52, says she too worries about this distancing from feminism. "If Emma Watson or Jennifer Lawrence talking feminism is the 'gateway drug' to getting young girls talking about the concept, then I'm all for it. Because that gives us a hook to lead them into discussions of the deeper issues."

And which issues should be first among equals?

"Economic justice has to be a central issue of the feminist movement," says Talia Cooper, 29, a youth educator, organizer, musician and the program director at Ma'yan, the women's project at the JCC of Manhattan. She eschews "trickle-down feminism." "If women are making it to the top and we're in a culture that's set up in a patriarchal, male-dominated world, that doesn't help."

"This thing that matters the most to me is the domestic sexism, that more expectations are placed on women," says Elissa Strauss. "If you really look at the wage gap, it's when women have kids. For this generation, millennial women are out-earning men until women start having kids, when everything changes…."

"I get ticked off by older feminists appearing judgmental about choices younger feminists make about grooming and beauty."

SEVEN GLORIOUS TRENDS

In this swirling mix of shifting landscapes and priorities, seven things fill me with glee:

1. Feminism in pop culture and public discourse

2. Economic justice as a feminist issue (minimum wage, paid leave, domestic workers)

3. Conversations about intersectionality, privilege and gender justice

4. Men as allies and ambassadors (more, please)

5. Feminist call-outs & correctives: Hashtag activism, social entrepreneurs, accountability via media watchdogs (like the annual VIDA Count of how many women—or how few—are quoted as experts)

6. Killing the blame game, shifting culpability away from individuals and holding institutions, systemic structures and men accountable. For examples, Google "Slut: The Play," or Sarah Silverman's "Rape Prevention Tips"

7. Mentoring and communities of support (from informal discussion groups and Binder Con to organizations like Women, Action & the Media)

WHAT-SHADE-IS-YOUR-PEDICURE FEMINISM

Today, the notion of "lipstick feminism"—with its embrace of traditional concepts like women's sexual power co-existing with feminist ideas—seems old-hat.

Think about body image and gender identity. And how differently three Jewish feminists tackle it on TV right now: Jill Soloway (born 1965) with her family drama about Mort/Moira, the transgender parent coming out in "Transparent"; Amy Schumer (born 1981) with outrageous feminist satire on "Inside Amy Schumer"; and Lena Dunham (born 1986), whose "Girls" brought an everyday brand of millennial feminism to HBO.

But how about pedicures? What if "pedicure feminist" isn't pejorative? What if it's what you call someone who does more than avoid nail salons or choose a shade and tip (well), but who also thinks in the "Bread and Roses" tradition of Rose Schneiderman (born 1882) about how we can best support organizing efforts for the underpaid women—primarily immigrants—who work in nail salons to make sure basic labor protections are enforced?

Surely it's better to define a feminist by her theory of change than by her appearance.

When I hear a self-identified feminist putting down another woman's choices—the downside of call-out culture—I flip my metaphorical wig. If your analysis is that a patriarchal society creates self-hating women, then you probably don't want to heap hate her way. Better to attack the larger systemic problems while doing what you can to empower women. My choices about appearance or marriage or motherhood reflect how I live my own feminism, but they aren't—or shouldn't be—a focus for judgement by other feminists. Do I think the personal is political? Absolutely. But the personal is also personal, and people are imperfect. I don't live my feminist ideals in every single choice I make. And I don't expect others to. Our collective feminist focus belongs on expanding all women's choices, not on judging individuals for theirs, especially when 20 percent of women live in poverty. So, no, I have no desire to walk a day in your stilettos. But I want all roads open to you, whatever you've got on your feet.

"Sometimes I get ticked off by women judging choices younger feminists make about grooming and beauty," says Sarah Darer Littman. There's a 'You're doing your hair, getting your nails done,' for the 'male gaze' or 'because patriarchy.' I have really frizzy hair, for instance. I spend a few hours every six months getting it straightened. I don't do it for men. I do it for me, because it saves time and money and it makes me feel good."

We'd be foolish not to recognize that our choices send out signals. At one of my social-justice jobs, folks would say, "Think Yiddish, Dress British." Meaning, if you want to introduce radical new ideas, blend in, so it's your vision, not your appearance, that stands out.

Yet that's not *always* the best approach. And certainly not the one taken by #FreeTheNipple, a campaign to have the same laws about nudity for both women and men while ensuring that public breastfeeding is respected, not criminalized.

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IN THE AMERICAN JEWNIVERSE

"There's a lot more attention to women's issues than there once was," says Rabbi Jill Jacobs. "When we talk about social justice, we'll talk about what it means for low-wage workers, or slavery and trafficking. These are economic justice issues, but every single one of those has a gender justice angle."

With more Generation X and Millennials leading Jewish newsrooms, women are shaping how the Jewish community understands itself. Since 2009, the Forward newspaper has investigated the gender gap via its annual survey of what top Jewish community professionals are paid. Editor Jane Eisner, who initiated the survey in 2009, wrote in a 2014 editorial that she'd hoped to spur a bigger shift in "the obvious gender imbalance."

"My generation of feminists has been educated to know that we are as good and deserving as our male peers, and therefore we don't take shit," says Avigayil Halpern, 18.

"Fuck yeah, I'm a feminist," says Jessie Kahnweiler, 30, creator of the film "The Skinny," a dark comedy about bulimia. "You better believe if Sarah or Rebecca or Ruth were still around, they'd be on Twitter giving us their two cents."

FROM CATCALLS TO CALLOUT CULTURE: **TYPECASTING GENERATIONS**

Like people (we hope), the characteristics of these three generations aren't static; they're dynamic and evolving.

BABY BOOMERS (51–69)
Name it. Nail it. Protest is action. Be the change you want to see.

Leadership is top-down. Change means addressing systemic sexism. Coined "Consciousness-raising," "Sisterhood is Powerful" and "Smash the Patriarchy." Broke glass ceilings, created feminist seders celebrating women's liberation.

Came of age with *The Feminine Mystique*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Rabbi Sally Priesand's 1972 ordination, Susan Brownmiller as Time's "Man of the Year," Ms. magazine.

GENERATION X (35–50)
Fight it. Expression is action. Combative, in your face.

Weaned on *Free to Be You and Me*, with a backdrop of the Anita Hill hearings and conspicuous consumption.

Creators of Riot Grrrl, Take Back the Night, Bitch Magazine. ACT UP! and a wave of alt-Jewish culture: Heeb, Jewcy, Jspot, ZEEK, Isle of Klezbos, Rebecca Walker's *Black, White and Jewish*, indie minyans, MomsRising, and the term "mansplaining."

MILLENNIALS (19–34)
Captains of call-out culture. WTF is a way of life. "Check your privilege."

Came of age with "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and women in the rabbinate. Expect instant feedback.

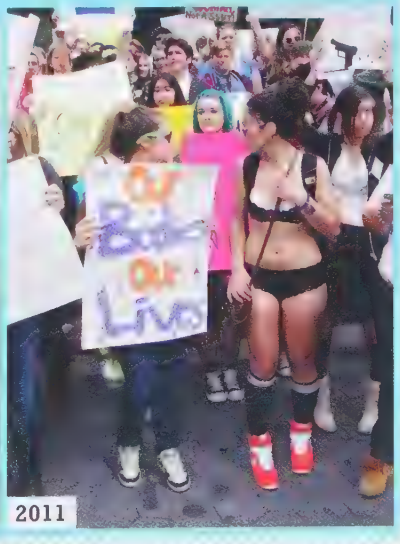
Life-hackers: "That doesn't work. Let's try this now." Confident. Expect to be stakeholders.

More likely to collaborate and lead horizontally. Creators and users of the "share economy"—like Airbnb, Uber and giving circles. Social media as a tool for social change.

1912

2004

1980



2011

2004 PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA.ORG, PATTYMOONEY. 2011 PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA.ORG, DAVID SHANKBONE

IS A POSITIVE CALL-OUT CULTURE POSSIBLE? **YES.**

Online creativity raises awareness and shifts attitudes, part of bigger pushes for change. Take Tumblr, where "100 Percent Schmucks" joins its secular peers "Congratulations, you have an all-male panel!" and "Having It Some" (co-created by a Jewish feminist, Sarah Seltzer), a platform for sharing (and exposing) family leave policies in various workplaces. Like the VIDA Count, these online accountability forums are call-out culture at its best.

One way to strengthen each other is to "be honest when conflict happens, and to approach each other as if we believe in the other's capacity to grow," says Shifra Bronznick, 61, founder of Advancing Women Professionals in the Jewish Community and co-author of *Leveling the Playing Field*.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, 40, is the author of *Surprised By God: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Religion*, and *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*. She thinks younger feminists have "pushed me to be more thoughtful, a better thinker, they've called me out on my stuff in ways that are humbling and helpful."

Similarly, consultant Sammie Moshenberg, 64, former director of Washington operations at the National Council of Jewish Women, describes ageism as "a huge problem. The organized Jewish community is very age-segregated, with traditional organizations (including women's organizations) largely led by people of my generation or older. The women's organizations covet younger feminists and spend a great deal of time and resources trying to figure out how to bring them into the fold. They 'officially' listen in the context of gatherings that they set up and control, but behaviors are harder to change." Moshenberg says she's grateful to "young colleagues for calling me on my comments and attitudes."

INTERSECTIONALITY & PRIVILEGE

The idea of intersectionality, a term that first flourished in feminist theory circles, has come to describe the ways we map out our complex identities. Oppression along race, class, ability, gender, and sexuality lines (among others) intersect in myriad ways, and we may hold privileges on one point on this grid but not on another. Just as Occupy Wall Street raised issues around economic justice, Black Lives Matter and the events in Ferguson and Charleston have pushed conversations about race, privilege, and intersectionality to the fore, including in American Jewish circles.

"I am multiracial, but I generally identify as a woman of color," says the 30-something April Baskin, a diversity consultant and Director of Resources and Training at *InterfaithFamily.com*. "I see the world through three lenses, as a woman, as a person of color, and as a Jew. Sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together." "Intersectionality is built into feminism," says Rabbi Rachel Barenblat.

"Today young women are more likely to understand the need for LGBT equality than understand the ways in which women as a whole are still under attack."

Now, we're seeing feminist organizers building on the concerns of 1990s Third Wave Feminism, which sometimes took the Second Wave to task for being too white, too middle-class and too slow to understand how many women face multiple barriers.

"The early feminists of the 60's and 70's kicked out the lesbians," laments Rabbi Denise Eger, 55, president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis—the first lesbian to hold this position. "Today young women are more likely to understand the need for LGBT equality than understand the ways in which women as a whole are still under attack."

Marjorie Dove Kent of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice kickstarted an important conversation in February in the Forward with "It's Time for Black Jews to Lead." April Baskin singles out social-justice organizations JFREJ and Bend the Arc for exploring ways "we can begin to shift our collective identity."

CREATING A **BADASS JEWISH FEMINIST FUTURE**

It's important to be mindful of where we're weakest. But also to have fun, be proud and GSD. Like the Notorious RBG. (That's get shit done and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, respectively, respectfully.)

"There's activism and advocacy coming from all levels–healthy work-life policies, that's exciting," says Shifra Bronznick. "We're seeing much more collaboration among the generations."

Gabrielle Birkner, 35, founder of the Forward's Sisterhood blog and now JTA managing editor, says, "I'm heartened by the way I see women supporting other women—celebrating their successes, promoting their ventures—in the digital sphere, and in communities like The Li.st (Rachel Sklar and Glynnis MacNicol's networking platform). These are the best kinds of sororities."

"Part of real feminist work," says Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, "is figuring out who you need to hand the mic to." ■

Erica Brody is an editor and writer who has worked at the intersection of social justice, journalism and strategy, most recently as executive director and editor in chief of ZEEK Magazine.

Gibbous Moon

fiction by
JESSAMYN HOPE

In the kitchen, Ziva peered through the oven window. Back when her mother made cookies, ovens didn't have windows. Her mother would have to open the door and take a peek before her glasses steamed up. The cookies needed another minute, so Ziva went to the windowsill to pick leaves off the mint plant. Outside, a gibbous moon glowed over the cedars behind the dining hall. Unlike ovens and most everything else, the moon looked exactly as it did when she was young. Had people really walked on it since then?

Those three months Dov was in Europe, trying to smuggle out fellow Jews, hoping to set up an underground railroad, she lay in bed at night staring out the window at the moon, watching it get larger and larger until it was so full she knew Dov must be noticing it wherever he was, if he was still alive. It comforted her to think their eyes were on the same thing. Then for the next two weeks she would watch it get smaller and smaller.

She had been close to losing hope of ever seeing him again when one lunch he came through the dining hall door. She didn't notice the stranger beside him in the baggy beige suit. Only Dov. She sprung up and ran past a row of tables and into his arms. Breathing in his familiar smell, she squeezed him as tight as she could as if to prove he were real. "You're home."

"This is Ziva," Dov told the man in the baggy suit. "My best friend. My wife. Ziva, this is Franz."

Ziva let go of Dov. She would meet many camp survivors over the next few months, but this was her first. If he hadn't been standing and giving her a rusty, rather grotesque smile, she might have thought

"ANY MINUTE SOMETHING COULD HAPPEN," SERIES, ESTHER NAOR, 2014.

this was a body that had been wasting in a coffin for some time, shrinking inside that beige suit. The whole dining hall—the kibbutz had fifty-some members now—had stopped eating to stare at the walking corpse.

"We'll have to think of a Hebrew name for you," she said in German, trying to give the man a welcoming smile. "How about Adam? I love that name. And we don't have an Adam on the kibbutz."

"What do you mean?" He had a Dresden accent, heavy on the v's. "He just told you my name. It's Franz." Though his black eyes were sunken into his skeletal face, they were not the eyes of a corpse. They were black—irises almost as dark as the pupils—and somehow still bright.

Ziva canted her head, confused. "Franz is a German name."

"I'm German."

How could she pick a fight with a man barely able to stand? But then how could she let such a comment go? "Well, then," she said, "you must be sad your country is losing the war."

Dov snapped, "Ziva!"

Franz smiled, revealing once more his turmeric-colored teeth, the ligaments in his meatless cheeks. His black eyes shone with amusement. "It seems you and Hitler have something in common. He also thinks I can't be German."

Ziva blinked at Franz in disbelief. "Did you just compare me to Hitler?"

"All I'm saying is that the Nazis tried their damnedest to do away with Franz, and if it's quite all right with you, I'd prefer to not lend them a helping hand."

Dov squeezed Ziva's shoulder before she had a chance to respond. "Franz, I'd have thought after all the stories I told you, you'd have known not to get on the wrong side of this woman."

Franz nodded. "It's true. I was warned."

Dov kissed Ziva on the forehead. "Now I have to rush back to Haifa with the truck. Four others are waiting there. Would you please take Franz to his tent? Nicely? Without making him want to turn around and go back to Europe?"

Dov hurried off and Ziva tried to sound nice. "Where's your bag?"

Franz shook his head. "No bag."

"Not a problem. We have soap and some clean clothes for you."

They hadn't even made it out of the dining hall before Ziva regretted putting the refugees' tents on the outskirts of the kibbutz. The man's gait was slow, jerky. They had been afraid to build the tents too close because who knew what diseases the refugees might be bringing with them. Rumors described people dying of typhus in the ghettos too fast to be buried, their corpses rotting on the sidewalks. Ziva held the door open for Franz and he stepped out of the hall as if his hips might break. How had Dov ferried this man across Europe?

So few Jews from Europe had ever come to see what they had built. She pointed out the new water tower, the banana fields, the young eucalyptuses.

"That's the children's house." She pointed at a white building, where the sound of children singing the Hebrew alphabet floated out of the windows. "Eight babies have been born on the kibbutz."

She pointed out everything, in part to make their plodding seem more natural, in part because so few Jews from Europe had ever come to see what they had built. She pointed out the new water tower, the banana fields in the distance, the health clinic, the young eucalyptuses. A regrettable I-told-you-so feeling rose inside her. She didn't want the feeling, but she had cautioned her fellow Jews that Europe could never be a real home, and they had laughed at her, called her a fanatic.

"Where's the dance hall?"

"Dance hall?"

"You know, where people do the jitterbug?" He smiled, the ligaments in his neck and cheeks popping again. "Loosen their bow ties?"

Ziva didn't know what the jitterbug was, only that she didn't like it. "We don't have jitterbug here. Or bow ties."

She didn't talk to him the rest of the way. She had shown him where they had drained a swamp to build a health clinic, and he asked about bow ties? Ever since she first laid eyes on this frail man, she had been feeling ashamed, because the truth was she hadn't just voted to put the tents far away: she had been the only one who voted for no tents. No refugees. She didn't want them on the kibbutz. Not because of their physical diseases—she didn't fear that—but their mental ones. This question about jitter-whatever dispelled that shame. She had been right. These refugees weren't socialists. They might not even be Zionists. Dov, of course, had voted to house them, and as soon as he heard the Jewish Agency had asked the settlements to prepare for a million more, he would telegram to offer Sadot Hadar as a refuge. People, he argued, were more important than ideals. But how was that possible? How could the two be separated? People were their ideals, and ideals only existed in people.

At last they reached the four tents halfway down the hill from the rest of the kibbutz. Beside the tents shimmered two twisted old olive trees. At the bottom of the dusty hill a streamlet babbled over white rocks. Ziva tied open a flap. "Welcome home."

Franz bowed into the white tent and considered the four military-style cots waiting on a dirt floor. "This isn't my home." He sat on a cot like an old man, hands on his knees. "Though before you start up again, don't worry, I'm not insane enough to see Germany as my home anymore. I have no home."

"Palestine can be your home."

Franz gazed at her, standing in the tent's entryway. She felt increasingly uncomfortable as his focus travelled from her unruly hair to her face, chest, tanned thighs. She pulled down on the hem of her shorts.

"It's been a long time since I've seen a healthy Jewish woman. It's beautiful."

Ziva's face warmed. She had to think quickly: Was there anything wrong with what he'd said? He hadn't called her beautiful. He said "It's beautiful," and it was, wasn't it? A healthy Jew—that was the whole point of the kibbutz.

She crossed the tent. "We have some books here on the table." Having no idea where the refugees would be coming from, they had collected books and pamphlets in Polish, Hungarian, Greek, French, Dutch. She handed Franz a German copy of *The Old New Land*. "Have you read it?

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L27MBN

This book can help you understand some of what we're trying to do here."

With a small smile, Franz rested his hand on the book.

Ziva narrowed her eyes on him. "Why are you smiling like that?"

"Like what?"

"That."

Franz shook his head with the smile still on his face.

She grabbed the book back and hugged it against her chest. "This isn't funny. I should think that would be apparent by now."

He shook his head again. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. I guess I don't know what to make of your…type anymore."

"My type?"

"Yes, ideologues. Before the war, to be honest, I merely found you people funny with your sashes and slogans. As long as you didn't try to censor my swing songs… But now, of course, you're right, it isn't funny anymore, and…I'm confused. I think it makes sense, after the Nazis, that I would have a…distaste for any sort of… movement. And yet, I know, don't think I don't know that if it weren't for people like you and Dov, I wouldn't be here right now. I wouldn't be alive."

"I can't understand what's so confusing. Not all ideologues are the same because—obviously—not all ideologies are the same. And you know what? I don't care if you think I'm funny, if I'm a fanatic with my *Altneuland*. Everything truly great has happened because somebody was a fanatic, because somebody was brave and obsessive enough to fight for their beliefs."

Franz rubbed his knees. "I would take up this conversation, but I think I'm too tired."

"Of course." Ziva realized she should have waited until he felt better, that she should let the refugees discover the books, discover everything, on their own. The place would speak for itself. She placed the book back on the table. "You need to rest. Here's a jug of boiled water. I'll have someone bring you something to eat. Do you want me to leave the flap open?"

"Yes, I like the light. And the view of those ugly trees."

"Ugly? Those are two-hundred-year-old olive trees."

As Ziva was ducking out of the tent, she heard: "Wait. Before you go, can I ask you a question?"

"ANY OTHER PLACE," ESTHER NAOR, 2015.

No refugees. She didn't want them on the kibbutz. Not because of their physical diseases—she didn't fear that—but their mental ones.

She held open the flap, stuck her head back in. "Yes?"

"What was your name in Germany? Surely it wasn't Ziva."

Was he trying to belittle her? Make it seem like she was someone other than who she was? Ziva debated saying nothing at all, just turning and walking away.

Her voice came out low, threatening. "Don't ever ask me that again."

That night she and Dov lay on the bed in the bungalow they had been sharing for four years. She was sad to find that after three months of living in fear that Dov was dead, she still didn't want to make love to him and was relieved when he never crawled on top of her. Sitting against the headboard, chain-smoking, he told her the rumors weren't true. It was much worse. The three of them had rented a room in Bergen, and all day ashes fell like snow flurries, dusting the streets, while the people went about their business amid the stink of burning bodies. He had no problem passing for an Aryan because no Jew could be as healthy as he anymore.

"One night, in a bar—we would go to pick up information—I ended up talking to a doctor's assistant from the camp. At first I thought, stupid me, that he was there to treat the sick. With his hand on my shoulder—I can still feel his hand there, Ziva, I don't think I'll ever stop feeling it on my shoulder—he told me about this experiment, how they were sewing the legs of Jewish men onto Jewish women and vice versa. I know; it takes a second to sink in. And I had to keep a straight face, keep a charmed face and drink my beer. I even smiled at him. Oh God, I feel sick. But I got something for that smile. He told us 'Jewish cockroaches' were hiding in the rubble of Dresden."

"Is something burning?" Ziva turned to see her son entering the kitchen.

"Oh!" She rushed to the oven. "The cookies!"

Eyal stood next to her, looking down at the smoking tray. "They look all right. Just the edges are black."

Here again was her middle-aged son. And this apartment in the old people's building. Was she losing her mind? It was disorienting enough, feeling these last few weeks as if events from sixty years ago had happened yesterday, but tonight was worse. Tonight it felt as if there was no such thing as today and yesterday. It felt as if the past were happening right now, and right now had been there in the past, that this moment with her fifty-year-old son and the burned cookies was already there with her on the boat to Palestine, when she and Dov leaned on the railing and gazed out at the waves. ■

Jessamyn Hope's fiction and memoirs have appeared in many literary magazines. This is excerpted from her new novel Safekeeping *(Fig Tree Books, 2015). jessamynhope.com.*

REVIEWS

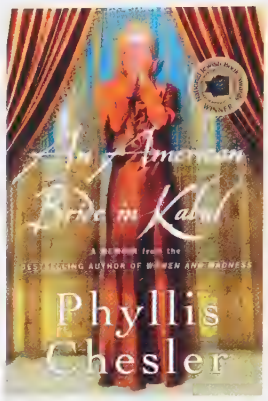
Between Misogyny and Radicalism

by Elana Sztokman

As a young Orthodox Jewish woman in pre-Betty Friedan America, **Phyllis Chesler** ran away from home, family and Judaism to marry an exotic, Western-educated Afghan man she'd met in college, moving with him to Afghanistan. When the man she thought she knew turned into a violent abuser committed to his polygamous Muslim roots, she found the wherewithal to escape, return to New York, finish university and reestablish her independence and her career. Over the past 50 years, she has become a feminist scholar of religion and gender, has written a dozen books on women's issues, and is now often cited as an expert on the status of women in Muslim societies.

In her memoir *An American Bride in Kabul* (Palgrave Macmillan, $27), Chesler sheds light on the inner life of a woman unknowingly entering an abusive marriage. She was isolated and trapped, forbidden from leaving the house except on rare occasion with a male chaperone, she was forced to wear Afghani clothing that was not hers and was far more covered than she was comfortable with, (and was severely punished when she was caught sunbathing outside her bedroom in a bikini), she was forced to eat food that she hated and was possibly spoiled, and her husband occasionally hit her. The seeming ease with which she fell into this frightening scenario is a striking reminder of how violence against women crosses all ethnic, religious and socioeconomic boundaries. There is often a charming, charismatic side to the abuser.

Yet this is in some ways a very culture-specific story. Chesler was trapped by a man who was being led by his societal surroundings. She writes that, in retrospect, she believes it was not her then-husband who abused her but rather the culture that had socialized him into this role. "At a young age I understood how little in life is personal. We may experience everything as if it is, but this is not necessarily true." Chesler reflects towards the end of the book, "My husband's [sic] betrayal was not personal. It was cultural. He merely treated me as an Afghan wife, not as an American college student with serious intellectual and artistic aspirations." The book is in many respects a story about Afghan society. Chesler captures the tensions between radical Islam and encroaching modernity, tracing the ebb and flow of these forces over the past five decades. Despite everything she experienced, and everything she knows about Afghani misogyny, she says she still enjoys Afghani food, wears Afghani robes when she works, and quips that perhaps she was Afghani in a past life.



She believes it was not her then-husband who abused her, but rather the culture that socialized him into this role.

For me, the strangest part of Chesler's entire story was her description of her relationship with her ex-husband. Despite having fled from him—for her life—she reconnected with him some 20 years later when he moved to the United States with his second wife and children. She built a close relationship with them, considers them family, and refers to the new wife as her "sister." "After all, we shared the same husband," she says enigmatically. I understand the value of reconciliation—perhaps even in abusive relationships—but her embrace of this family and the retention of an almost romantic admiration of the family seems to negate some basic feminist goals of female empowerment in the face of abuse, especially since her descriptions indicates her ex-husband to be even more misogynistic and anti-Western than he was when they were married. I found it difficult to understand her ambivalence about him—on the one hand condemning him and on the other hand trying to view him as sort-of Western, someone with whom she will always have a positive connection.

The book is divided into two parts, with the first section her personal account of abuse and escape, followed by a more historical and political analysis of gender as Islam has radicalized. Chesler's analysis of Osama Bin Laden's abuse of women provides some interesting insights into the relationship between misogyny and radicalism. Americans usually focus on his hatred for the West, but Bin Laden also hated women, and treated his many wives with frightening abuse, keeping them caged in isolation and poverty while he enjoyed his own status, wealth and power. Her recollections of Muslim feminists, some of whom have been killed for their work, offer a wrenching perspective on the real, life-threatening dangers in promoting gender equality in the Muslim world. Because the connection between the two parts is awkward, and the writing a little disjointed, I wondered whether she was using her own story to make a political point or whether she became who she is because of this past. Either way, this memoir is a reminder of how political our personal lives really are.

ELANA SZTOKMAN *is the author of* Educating in the Divine Image: Gender Issues in Orthodox Jewish Day Schools *and* The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World.

Tellings and Retellings in Books for Young Readers

Two new picture books are geared toward the Fourth Generation, the generation of Holocaust survivors' great-grandchildren.

The Amsterdam horse chestnut tree that grew in the courtyard of the "Secret Annex" is the narrator of ***Anne Frank and the Remembering Tree*** by **Sandy Sasso**, illustrated by **Erika Steiskal** (Skinner House Books, $16). The tree, a quiet witness to Anne's life in the attic, lived to be

170 years old before it eventually broke in a storm. In a symbolic gesture of hope, saplings from the tree are now planted at Liberty Park in New York City, the Boston Common, the Clinton Library in Little Rock, the Children's Museum in Indianapolis and in other special places for remembering in 32 countries around the world. This large-size book tells the tree's story simply and makes imaginative use of a unique perspective.

Jane Yolen, author of the 1988 best-selling middle-grade time-travel novel *The Devil's Arithmetic*, now has a picture book for young readers, ***Stone Angel***, illustrated by **Katie May Green** (Philomel, $17), also set during the Holocaust. In a sobering but somehow also reassuring story beginning and ending in Paris, a young girl narrates her family's survival.

At first the family lives a happy life, then is ostracized as Jews. The family witnesses attacks, escapes to the forest with partisan fighters, sails to England and, after a gap of a few years, returns home together after hearing of the Nazi defeat and the war's end. In an afterword, Yolen offers some straightforward basic facts about the Holocaust underpinning the experiences of the book, such as: "Yes, many freedoms fighters in Europe—called partisans—took to the woods, where they hid out and fought a guerrilla war against the Nazi troops."

From Israel, the new picture book ***Yakinton, a Story about Friendship and Song*** by **Shoham Smit**, illustrated by **Roni Fahima** (Kinneret, 49 NIS) tells the story of two talented women who created Israel's beloved children's song "Hyacinth," which begins: *Laila laila meestakelet halevana / al hapraheem asher heneetzoo hageena* ["Night after night the moon looks down / at the flowers blooming out of the ground."] Leah Goldberg, the renowned Hebrew poet, and Rivka Gvili the composer, both came to Israel with their families as children, from Lithuania and Hungary respectively. They had much in common, and also many differences. Though they didn't know each other growing up, when they met as adults—at a conference—they became fast friends. Just as when a chance meeting between two people can lead to love and the birth of children, Smit tells us, the chance meeting of two artists can lead to a creation, in this case a song. Alas, right now this sweet book is available only in Hebrew.

Interstellar Cinderella, by **Deborah Underwood**, illustrated by **Meg Hunt** (Chronicle, $17), retells a familiar folktale, but this time with a new, feminist, STEM-celebrating vocabulary and in witty rhyming text: "Once upon a planetoid, amid her tools and sprockets, a girl named Cinderella dreamed of fixing fancy rockets." And this: "She thought this over carefully. Her family watched in panic. 'I'm far too young for marriage, but I'll be your chief mechanic!'"

Stella Brings the Family (Chronicle $17) is a debut picture book by **Miriam B. Schiffer**, illustrated by **Holly Clifton-Brown**. It tells of a young child with two dads who doesn't have a mommy to bring to school for the Mother's Day celebration. So she negotiates! It takes a village in this book, which reminds us of how far we've come since Leslea Newman's groundbreaking *Heather Has Two Mommies* was first published in 1989.

NAOMI DANIS

New Fiction from Three Lilith Authors

by Yona Zeldis McDonough

Short stories by each of these three have appeared in Lilith.

Fields of Exile by **Nora Gold** (Dundern, $24.99) tells the story of Judith, a 32-year-old Canadian who returns home from the life she has made for herself in Israel in order to care for her ailing father. When he dies, she is eager to go back. But he had begged her before his death to go back to graduate school, so she enrolls in a local social work program. Within this seemingly safe academic oasis, Judith's world is rocked. In Israel, she had been a peace activist, and identified with left-wing politics there. But her new intellectual community is openly hostile to Israel, and suddenly everything she cherishes is threatened when she learns that the keynote speaker for Anti-Oppression Day supports attacks not only on Israeli military targets, but also on Israeli civilians and on Jews worldwide.

Gold's willingness to grapple with subtle, intellectual forms of anti-Semitism could not be timelier or more important, and her dissection of the problem is both nuanced and astute. Yet this is not a novel-of-ideas, but one grounded in entirely believable interpersonal relationships and complex threads of human feeling. After hearing a particularly upsetting comment in her Introduction to Social Justice class, Judith is unable to speak the truth raging in her heart:

"Greg is still talking but she can't hear him anymore. She is feeling herself disappear.... She is not real now, she's just a shell. But no, there is one thing left inside her: a wind. A wind blowing around and around, forming itself into a tornado. A tornado that is a scream. And in the middle of the scream, there is only one word. *Israel.*"

By the close of this provocative, insightful novel, we, like Judith, come to understand how vast the scope of exile can truly be.

Much of the debut novel from **Michelle Brafman**, ***Washing the Dead*** (Prospect Park Books, $16), plays out on a smaller stage—a tightly knit Orthodox community in Milwaukee—but her eye is no less acute than Gold's. In a story that shuttles back and forth between 1973 and 2009, she trains her gaze on Barbara Blumfeld, a suburban mom and preschool teacher who was 17 when her own mother's passionate involvement with the local *shabbos goy* tore her world apart. But the affair began long before that:

"I am six years old, and I am sitting across the table from my mother, eating my after-school snack and watching her smoke. I spread peanut butter on my apple with a paring knife, wondering why she hasn't noticed that I'm using it or that I've lost my front tooth. She is looking through me. We're sitting so close that I can see her eyelashes, thicker than my doll

In Israel she had been a peace activist, and left wing, but her new intellectual community is openly hostile to Israel.

POETRY

MOTHER TONGUE

Some days I long for the *mama-loshen*
the secret words in my bones

my grandpa smoking in the arm chair
kvetching about the *shmucks* in the government

and the *dreck* on the streets. I thought these were English words
I listened to, as I *piatchked* around the dark house,

kibbitzing, because there was nothing else to do.
We didn't know sentences, just words

cracked off like bark from our past tree lives
already transplanted, my grandparents—branches;

my parents—apples; my brothers and I—seedlings
And my children, who are they in whitewashed New England

laughing at words I thought I'd forgotten
until I have to explain

tchatchke, shmendrick,
mishegas, shlock.

Sometimes I long for my unpolished accent,
despite my shame describing the hall

of my house to Californian friends.
They thought I said "hole"

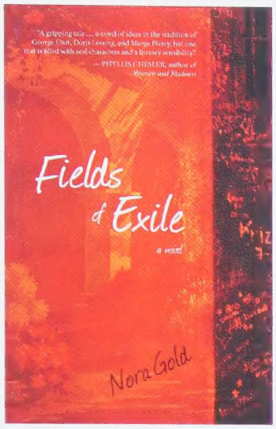
as if I were a rodent living in dirt.
Now, when I speak, the words are bland as rice

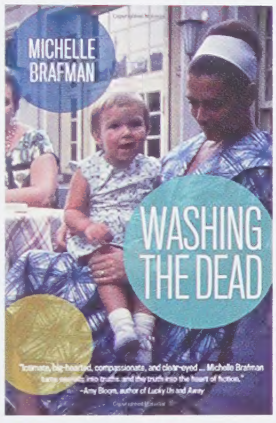
bleaching the memories of my childhood
that endless *shlep.*

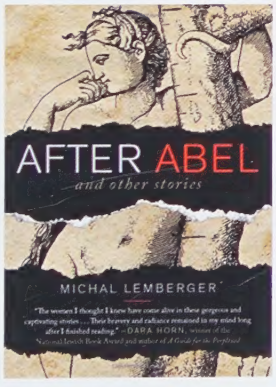
D. DINA FRIEDMAN

Cassandra's, but she cannot see me. This is the first disappearance that I remember, but now I know that her leaving was gradual, an accretion of tiny moments that led to her affair and her slow exit from our lives."

Shunned by the community for her mother's transgression, Barbara forges an entirely different life for herself. But years later, when the rebbetzin from her childhood asks her to come back to help perform the ritual burial washing of a beloved teacher, she's pulled back to that tumultuous time. She can either ignore the summons or find the strength to confront the past, reach out to her estranged mother, and redirect the course of her own family's future. How she goes about it is the substance of this beautifully wrought novel, one in which Brafman examines the inner lives of her characters with the dexterity of a surgeon and the compassion of a saint.







Calling the biblically themed stories in the new collection by **Michal Lemberger** *midrashim* is like calling champagne a carbonated beverage. The nine stories in ***After Abel*** (Prospect Park Books, $16) pulse with the rhythms of ancient life, infusing into these tales a kind of immediacy so bracing as at times to be shocking. How Lemberger, an academic who teaches the Bible as Literature course at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, does this, is its own kind of miracle. In disarmingly simple yet powerful prose, she limns the lives of these Bible women, and we come to understand them—even love them—in new ways. Here is Eve, meditating on her post-Eden life:

"After we fled the Garden, wrapped in the skins God had covered us with, we found out what cold was and clung to one another. But the warmth between our bodies made Adam's clothes bulge and his breath quicken. His weight on me, the rocking of his body into mine, made me crave more. Dark came so early in those days. Nights I spent cataloguing every part of him, naming and touching—shoulder, elbow, nipple, stomach, shaft, scrotum. Each a new discovery, a new source of delight."

Finally, Eve gets credit for naming—at least some body parts. And there's much more, compactly told in this title story. She mourns the death of her son Abel, and though she has seen animals die, this is, movingly, her first understanding of human mortality.

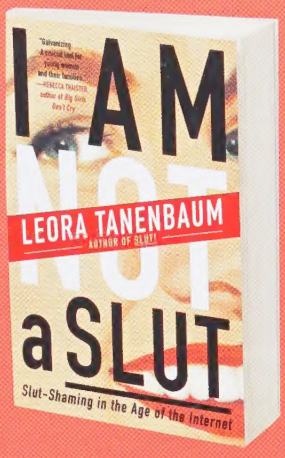
The story in this collection about Lot's wife (who gets her own name in this telling) originally appeared in Lilith. The others are all new, and each a gem.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH's *sixth novel,* You Were Meant for Me, *was published by New American Library in 2014. She is Lilith's fiction editor.*

MORE: *author interviews and book news at Lilith.org/blog.*

"*I Am Not a Slut* is a profoundly eye-opening book about the dangerous world young women are forced to negotiate and the blind-eye all too often turned toward it by their peers, adults, and even the media. It should be required reading."

– Elissa Schappell, author of *Blueprints for Building Better Girls*



"This brilliant, thoughtful, and compelling investigation of young womanhood commands the reader's attention from beginning to end."

– *Booklist* (starred review)

I AM NOT a SLUT

LEORA TANENBAUM

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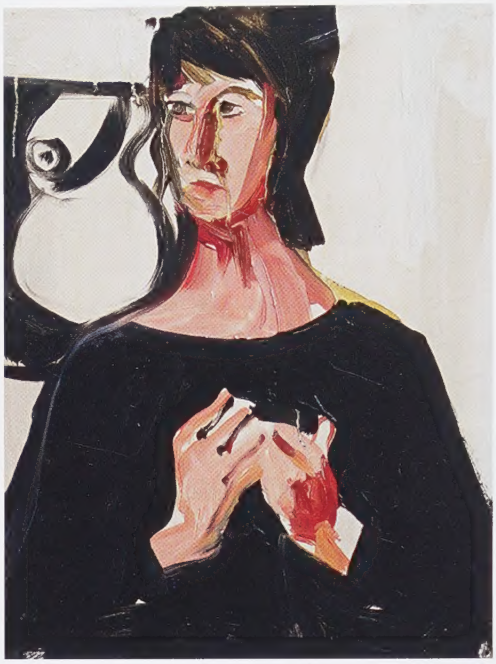


Gertrude Stein! Hannah Arendt! Susan Sontag!

Imagine these 20th-century greats and 31 other Jewish women as contemporaries sharing space in a museum show. These new portraits by London-based painter Chantal Joffe also include Diane Arbus, Nancy Spero and Alice B. Toklas. The artist gathered both well-known and obscure texts and images, and built whole worlds around herself and the women, whom she has represented at various stages in their lives, during moments both big and small. "Using Walls, Floors, and Ceilings: Chantal Joffe" is on view through October 18, 2015, at the Jewish Museum in New York. *thejm.org*

Theatre and the Holocaust

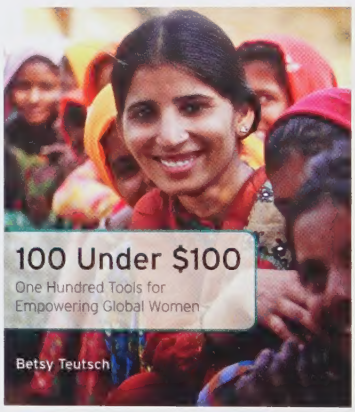
An annotated bibliography by Rochelle Saidel lists plays about women and the Holocaust, plays about the Holocaust by women, and books about women, theatre, and the Holocaust. It includes essays by Meghan Brodie and a guide by Karen Schulman about using theatre to teach women's Holocaust experiences. This handbook will eventually be incorporated into a virtual encyclopedia called "Holocaust Theatre Online Connection." Send your suggestions for additions. *Rememberwomen.org*

"For You the Sun Will Shine"

Songs written by female composers, both Jewish and Gentile, who faced the Holocaust, evoke rage, heartbreak and yearning. They represent a mostly overlooked aspect of the Holocaust: the work of female artists who fell prey to the Nazi scourge. In a new album they are interpreted by the Israeli-Italian singer known as Shulamit, who, along with Frank London and Shai Bachar, set the haunting words to music. *shulamitvoice.com*

History for Girls

SPARK Movement—a feminist organization for girls—reached out to Google after noticing that the tech giant's daily doodles featured women only 17% of the time. SPARK (Sexualization Protest, Activism, Resistance, Knowledge) which celebrates what girls can *do*—not just what they look like—was invited to research and honor notable women through a mapping project powered by Google. Now, when users of the Field Trip app switch on history notifications, they're alerted as they approach the location where a woman has made history, and see information about her achievements. All the research and work behind this "On the Map" project was performed by girls aged 13–22. Women on the map so far include, in Santiago, Chile, the Arpilleristas, a group of women who wove colorful tapestries documenting the turmoil and violence of Pinochet's regime; in San Francisco, Mary Ellen Pleasant, an activist and abolitionist who, among other things, dressed like a jockey to help slaves who had escaped their plantations; and, in Lyme, England, Mary Anning, who discovered fossils of a Plesiosaurus, rocking the scientific community. Nominate your favorite historical women to be featured at *sparksummit.com/onthemap*



Ingenious Projects

In this comprehensive resource guide, Judaica artist and eco-activist Betsy Teutsch offers detailed descriptions, photos and links for 100 simple and ingenious projects you can participate in to empower women all over the world who are challenged by poverty. Some examples? Replacing female genital mutilation with alternative rites of passage. Creating disposable menstrual pads from processed banana fiber, making it possible for adolescent girls to attend school more regularly. Cervical cancer screenings using vinegar. Urban "bag gardening." Improving roofing by turning plastic bottles into thatch. This book is a great reminder of human creativity,

CHANTAL JOFFE, BETTY FRIEDAN, 2014, OIL ON CANVAS, AND DIANE ARBUS, 2014, OIL ON BOARD. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND VICTORIA MIRO, LONDON.

demonstrating how one person can make a difference. *100 Under $100: One Hundred Tools for Empowering Global Women. 100under100.org*

Art, Craft and Design

In the 1950s and 60s, when men dominated painting, sculpture, and architecture, women had considerable impact in alternative materials such as textiles, ceramics, and metals. Largely unexamined in major art historical surveys, either because of their gender or their choice of materials, these pioneering women achieved success and international recognition, establishing a model of professional identity for those who followed. Featuring more than 100 works, "Pathmakers: Women in Art, Craft and Design, Midcentury and Today," focuses on a core cadre of influential women designers, artists, and teachers—including Edith Heath, Sheila Hicks, Karen Karnes, Dorothy Liebes and Eva Zeisel—who used clay, fiber, and metal in innovative ways. This cohort came to maturity along with the Museum of Arts and Design itself, founded in 1956 as the center of the emerging American modern craft movement. Through September 27 at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. *Madmuseum.org*

"Stars Without a Heaven"

About 1.5 million of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust were children. Only a few thousand European Jewish children survived. A new exhibit, "Children in the Holocaust: Stars Without a Heaven" at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, focuses on how these children held onto life. Their toys, games, artwork, diaries, poems and personal stories reveal their attempts to maintain childhood and youth by creating an imagined reality different from what surrounded them. Curator Yehudit Inbar writes that the exhibit took inspiration from these words written by Polish psychologist and orphanage director Janusz Korczak in his *Rules of Life: A Childhood of Dignity*: "It is wrong for adults to say—and for the more intelligent of the children to repeat after them 'Such a big boy and he plays like a baby; such a big girl and she still plays with dolls.' What matters is not what one plays with, but rather how and what one thinks and feels while playing. One can play wisely with a doll or play childishly and foolishly at chess." Until April 2016. *Yadvashem.org*

Raising Race-Conscious Children

"It starts one conversation at a time," writes Sachi Feris, whose blog and website for parents links to relevant resources like books, organizations, workshops and phone consultations. "If we commit to collectively trying to talk about race with young children, we can lean on one another for support as we, together, envision a world where we actively challenge racism each and every day." The organization aims to create a supportive environment for parents working on this issue. *raceconscious.org*

Good Deeds Day

Started by Israeli businesswoman and philanthropist Shari Arison, Good Deeds Day is organized by *Ruach Tova* (Good Spirit), and has become an annual tradition since 2007 when 7,000 individuals volunteered. In 2015 there will be 930,000 participants in 61 countries volunteering in hospitals, orphanages, with Holocaust survivors, planting gardens, and in afterschool programs. For information, ideas and tips: *gdd.goodnet.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

For more, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, and check out Lilith.org, where you can sign up for Lilith's free email newsletter. Send ideas for this section to info@Lilith.org.

EVA ZEISEL, FRAME FOR A FOLDING CHAIR, 1949, CHROME-PLATED TUBULAR STEEL. COURTESY MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN.

PANIC IN A SUITCASE

by YELENA AKHTIORSKAYA

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE NOSTALGIA. That is to say, it started with the end. With memories, anecdotes, old photographs, wafts, vapors. That was the part of Odessa that was mine—the smoke. My family produced no shortage of nostalgic exhaust and I got high off the fumes. Mealtimes, car rides, strolls to Coney Island were just an excuse to reminisce about a time that was more authentic, exciting, frightening, funny, devastating, and bizarre than my own. We fed each other's longing, reinforcing the myth of our native city, of the golden age, which ended, it seemed, not even on the day of our departure, but the day of my birth. What luck!

And yet, what luck! I'd been whisked away from a bleak fate in Ukraine and brought as a fledgling to the land of opportunity. My parents did the work—I tagged along for the ride. While they struggled to learn English and were never to lose their thick accents, I picked up the language in no time (but also never fully shed the accent, out of sympathy, let's say). They were hemmed in by limitations. For me, the sky was the limit. I had to be grateful. But an abstract stash of opportunities means little in the face of a stash of photographs of my parents and their giant group of friends lounging around every corner of a resplendent, lazy Odessa. My reality paled in comparison. I knew I could never recreate here, in this massive city, in our fractured time, what they had there, so I didn't bother; I mourned what I hadn't even had the privilege to lose, and obsessed, trying to hear every story, get every detail.

If we were in thrall to the past, so was everyone around us. In our neighborhood, nostalgia was the norm. Though we'd already been in America for two decades, we still lived in the ex-Soviet enclave of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn: Russian was spoken on the street, Russian slop sold in the shops, Speedos the standard on the beach. We were running into the same people on the boardwalk that we would've run into on the boulevard in Odessa. It was charming but also heartbreaking, and more than a little maddening in the instances when no attempt was made at learning the language, no interest shown in anything outside the bubble.

My parents tried to see as much outside of the bubble as possible, using their weekends to partake of the city's cultural opportunities and their precious vacation days to travel far and wide. And yet the daily reality was that they were working like dogs, tired all the time, stressed. When you immigrate, the dream of the old country is born, while the dream of the new one dies, even if you end up achieving it. They were still friends with the same group from Odessa, and they still got together on weekends, but in an obligatory fashion. They no longer laughed late into the night. New York life separated people. Isolated them. No one argues that the advantages of immigration are great, but no one wants to weigh them against the disadvantages either. Was my uncle, who hadn't immigrated, so much worse off? He was living on the dacha that had swelled to celestial proportions in our imagination, eating fruits and vegetables from our Eden. My grandfather Skyped his son daily (from the computer in my bedroom) and made him give an elaborate account of everything that was going on there, in the land we technically left behind but clung to more than ever.

Such musings weren't for the sharing. Nostalgia must remain platonic. It has no bearing on real life, just as real life has no bearing on it. If I overstepped the boundary, I got a different kind of earful: the horrors they had lived through, the hunger, the oppression, the anti-Semitism, the fear. This was all true, of course. But the truth accommodates all sorts of contradictions. My family had earned the right to bemoan that dreadful time, and also to miss it. They had a blank check for complaining, and a bloated savings account of memories. In this sense—and really all others—my bank account was broke. I had nada.

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It was in this mental climate that I embarked on my novel *Panic in a Suitcase*. I didn't know what I was doing. At the heart of the book, and perhaps at the heart of my becoming a writer, was an immense sense of helplessness. I'd done more than my fair share of listening. In fact, I was all listened out. The stories my family had poured into me over the years were putting undue pressure on my vital organs. Writing was a way of letting them out, and the schizophrenic sentiment that went along. Since I had no voice of my own, I began by channeling my family's; hence the beginning of the book sounds like a polyphonic immigrant mongrel. In the process, I had to find my own voice, create my own story, which is also what I also had to do in my life—overcome the sensation that my family's story was more real, or more interesting, or more earned, than my own. I had to start living for myself, and the only way I knew how was to write myself into existence. For better or worse I've never been able to separate the two—writing is life.

Yelena Akhtiorskaya was born in Odessa in 1985 and raised in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Her writing has appeared in n+1, The New Republic, and elsewhere. Panic in a Suitcase *was a finalist for the 2015 Sami Rohr Prize for Fiction. A version of this essay appeared in Jewish Book World.*

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